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*Looking over the rails at him.*

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# A Woman Hater. BY CHARLES READE

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A Woman Hater

# A WOMAN HATER.

## CHAPTER XIX.

Edward Severne, master of arts, dreaded Rhoda Gale, M.D. He had deluded, in various degrees, several ladies that were no fools; but here was one who staggered and puzzled him. Bright and keen as steel, quick and spirited, yet controlled by judgment, and always mistress of herself, she seemed to him a new species. The worst of it was, he felt himself in the power of this new woman, and indeed he saw no limit to the mischief she might possibly do him if she and Zoe compared notes. He had thought the matter over, and realized this more than he did when in London. Hence the good youth's delight at her illness, noticed in a former chapter.

He was very thoughtful all breakfast-time, and, as soon as it was over, drew Vizard apart, and said he would postpone his visit to London until he had communicated with his man of business. He would go to the station and telegraph him; and by that means would do the civil and meet Miss Gale. Vizard stared at him.

"You meet my virago? Why, I thought you disapproved her entirely."

"No, no; only the idea of a female doctor, not the lady herself. Besides, it is a rule with me, my dear fellow, never to let myself disapprove my friends' friends."

"That is a bright idea, and you are a good fellow," said Vizard. "Go and meet the pest by all means, and bring her here to luncheon. After luncheon we will drive her up to the farm and ensconce her."

Edward Severne had this advantage over most impostors, that he was masculine or feminine as occasion re-

quired. For instance, he could be hysterical, or bold, to serve the turn. Another example — he watched faces like a woman, and yet he could look you in the face like a man, especially when he was lying. In the present conjuncture a crafty woman would have bristled with all the arts of self-defence, but stayed at home and kept close to Zoe: not so our master of arts; he went manfully to meet Rhoda Gale, and so secure a *tête-à-tête*, and learn, if possible, what she meant to do, and whether she could be cannily propitiated. He reached the station before her, and took that opportunity to wire a very intelligent person who, he knew, conducted delicate inquiries, and had been very successful in a divorce case, public two years before. Even as he despatched this message there was a whistling and a ringing, and the sound of a coming train, and Ned Severne ran to meet Rhoda Gale with a heart palpitating a little, and a face beaming greatly to order. He looked for her in the first-class carriages; but she was in the second, and saw him. He did not see her till she stepped out on the platform. Then he made towards her. He took off his hat, and said with respectful zeal, "If you will tell me what luggage you have, the groom shall get it out."

Miss Gale's eyes wandered over him loftily. "I have only a box and a bag, sir, both marked R. G."

"Joe," said he — for he had already made friends with all the servants, and won their hearts — "box and bag marked R. G. Miss Gale, you had better take your seat in the carriage."

Miss Gale gave a little supercilious nod, and he showed her obsequiously into the carriage. She laid her head back and contemplated vacancy ahead in a manner anything but encouraging to this new admirer fate had sent her. He turned away a little discomfited, and when the luggage was brought up he had the bag placed inside,

and the box in a sort of boot, and then jumped in and seated himself inside. "Home," said he to the coachman, and off they went. When he came in she started with well-feigned surprise, and stared at him.

"Oh," said she, "I have met you before. Why, it is Mr. Severne. Excuse me taking you for one of the servants. Some people have short memories, you know."

This deliberate affront was duly felt, but parried with a master-hand.

"Why, I *am* one of the servants," said he; "only I am not Vizard's. I'm yours."

"In-deed!"

"If you will let me."

"I am too poor to have fine servants."

"Say too haughty: you are not too poor, for I shall not cost you anything but a gracious word now and then."

"Unfortunately I don't deal in gracious words, only true ones."

"I see that."

"Then suppose you imitate me, and tell me why you came to meet me?"

This question came from her with sudden celerity, like lightning out of a cloud, and she bent her eyes on him with that prodigious keenness she could throw into those steel-gray orbs, when her mind put on its full power of observation.

Severne colored a little and hesitated.

"Come now," said this keen witch, "don't wait to make up a reason. Tell the truth for once — quick! — quick! — why did *you* come to meet *me?*"

"I didn't come to be bullied," replied supple Severne, affecting sullenness.

"You didn't!" cried the other, acting vast surprise. "Then what *did* you come for?"

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"I don't know; and I wish I hadn't come."

"That I believe." Rhoda shot this in like an arrow.

"But," continued Severne, "if I hadn't, nobody would; for it is Vizard's justicing day, and the ladies are too taken up with a lord to come and meet such vulgar trifles as genius, and learning, and sci—"

"Come, come!" said Rhoda, contemptuously; "you care as little about science, and learning, and genius, as I possess them. You won't tell me? Well, I shall find you out." Then, after a pause, "Who is this lord?"

"Lord Uxmoor."

"What kind of a lord is he?"

"A very bushy lord."

"Bushy — oh, bearded like the pard. Now, tell me," said she, "is he cutting you out with Miss Vizard?"

"You shall judge for yourself. Please spare me on that one topic — if you ever spared anybody in your life."

"Oh, dear me!" said Rhoda, coolly. "I'm not so very cruel; I'm only a little vindictive, and cat-like. If people offend me, I like to play with them a bit, and amuse myself, and then kill them — kill them — kill them; that is all."

This pretty little revelation of character was accompanied with a cruel smile that showed a long row of dazzling white teeth. They seemed capable of killing anything from a liar up to a hickory-nut.

Severne looked at her and gave a shudder. "Then Heaven forbid you should ever be my enemy!" said he, sadly; "for I am unhappy enough already."

Having delivered this disarming speech, he collapsed, and seemed to be overpowered with despondency. Miss Gale showed no signs of melting. She leaned back and eyed him with steady and composed curiosity, as a zoölogist studying a new specimen and all its little movements.

They drove up to the hall-door, and Miss Gale was conducted to the drawing-room, where she found Lord Uxmoor and the two young ladies. Zoe shook hands with her. Fanny put a limp paw into hers, which made itself equally limp directly, so Fanny's dropped out. Lord Uxmoor was presented to her, at his own request. Soon after this, luncheon was announced. Vizard joined them, welcomed Rhoda genially, and told the party he had ordered the break, and Uxmoor would drive them to the farm round by Hillstoke and the Common; "And so," said he, "by showing Miss Gale our most picturesque spot at once, we may perhaps blind her to the horrors of her situation — for a time."

The break was driven round in due course, with Uxmoor's team harnessed to it. It was followed by a dog-cart crammed with grooms, Uxmoorian and Vizardian. The break was padded and cushioned, and held eight or nine people very comfortably. It was, indeed, a sort of picnic van, used only in very fine weather. It rolled on beautiful springs. Its present contents were Miss Gale and her luggage and two hampers full of good things for her; Vizard, Severne, and Miss Dover. Zoe sat on the box beside Lord Uxmoor. They drove through the village, and Mr. Severne was so obliging as to point out its beauties to Miss Gale. She took little notice of his comments, except by a stiff nod every now and then, but eyed each house and premises with great keenness.

At last she stopped his fluency by inquiring whether he had been into them all; and when he said he had not, she took advantage of that admission to inform him that in two days' time she should be able to tell him a great deal more than he was likely to tell her, upon his method of inspecting villages.

"That is right," said Vizard, "snub him. He gets snubbed too little here. How dare he pepper science

with his small-talk? But it is our fault,—we admire his volubility."

"Oh," said Fanny, with a glance of defiance at Miss Gale, "if we are to talk nothing but science, it *will* be a weary world."

After the village there was a long gradual ascent of about a mile, and then they entered a new country. It was a series of woods and clearings, some grass, some arable. Huge oaks flung their arms over a road lined on either side by short turf, close cropped by the gypsies' cattle. Some band or other of them was always encamped by the roadside, and never two bands at once. And between these giant trees, not one of which was ever felled, you saw here and there a glade, green as an emerald; or a yellow stubble, glowing in the sun. After about a mile of this, still mounting, but gradually, they emerged upon a spacious table-land, a long broad open grass plateau, studded with cottages. In this lake of grass Uxmoor drew up at a word from Zoe to show Miss Gale the scene. The cottages were white as snow, and thatched as at Islip; but instead of vegetable gardens they all had orchards. The trees were apple and cherry; of the latter not less than a thousand in that small hamlet. It was literally a lawn, a quarter of a mile long, and about two hundred yards broad, bordered with white cottages and orchards. The cherries, red and black, gleamed like countless eyes among the cool leaves. There was a little church on the lawn that looked like a pigeon-house. A cow or two grazed peacefully. Pigs, big and little, crossed the lawn grunting and squeaking satisfaction, and dived into the adjacent woods after acorns, and here and there a truffle the villagers knew not the value of. There was a pond or two in the lawn; one had a wooden plank fixed on uprights, that went in some way. A woman was out on the board bare-armed,

dipping her bucket in for water. In another pond an old knowing horse stood gravely cooling his heels up to the fetlocks. These, with shirts, male and female, drying on a line, and white-headed children rolling in the dust, and a donkey braying his heart out for reasons known only to himself if known at all, were the principal details of the sylvan hamlet; but on a general survey there were grand beauties. The village and its turf lay in the semicircular sweep of an unbroken forest; but at the sides of the leafy basin glades had been cut for drawing timber, stacking bark, etc.; and what Milton calls so happily "the chequered shade," was seen in all its beauty; for the hot sun struggled in at every aperture, and splashed the leaves and the path with fiery flashes and streaks, and topaz brooches, all intensified in fire and beauty by the cool adjacent shadows.

Looking back, the view was quite open in most places. The wooded lanes and strips they had passed were little more in so vast a panorama than the black stripes on a backgammon-board. The site was so high that the eye swept over all, and rested on a broad valley beyond, with a patchwork pattern of variegated fields, and the curling steam of engines flying across all England; then swept by a vast incline up to an horizon of faint green hills, the famous pastures of the United Kingdom. So that it was a deep basin of foliage in front; but you had only to turn your body, and there was a forty-mile view, with all the sweet varieties of color that gem our fields and meadows, as they bask in the afternoon sun of that golden time when summer melts into autumn, and mellows without a chill.

"Oh!" cried Miss Gale, "don't anybody speak, please. It is too beautiful."

They respected an enthusiasm so rare in this young lady, and let her contemplate the scene at her ease.

"I reckon," said she, dogmatically, and nodding that wise little head, "that this is old England; the England my ancestors left in search of liberty — and that's a plant that ranks before cherry-trees, I rather think. No, I couldn't have gone; I'd have stayed and killed a hundred tyrants. But I wouldn't have chopped their heads off; (to Vizard, very confidentially) I'd have poisoned 'em."

"Don't, Miss Gale," said Fanny; "you make my blood run cold."

As it was indifferent to Miss Gale whether she made Miss Dover's blood run cold or not, she paid no attention, but proceeded with her reflections. "The only thing that spoils it is the smoke of those engines, reminding one that in two hours you or I, or that pastoral old hermit there in a smock-frock and a pipe, and oh, what bad tobacco! can be wrenched out of this paradise, and shrieked and rattled off and flung into that wilderness of brick called London, where the hearts are as hard as the pavement — except those that have strayed there from Barfordshire."

The witch changed face, and tone, and everything, like lightning, and threw this last in with a sudden grace and sweetness that contrasted strangely with her usual sharpness.

Zoe heard, and turned round to look down on her with a smile as sweet as honey. "I hardly think that is a drawback," said she, amicably. "Does not being able to leave a place make it sweeter? for then we are free in it, you know. But I must own there *is* a drawback — the boys' faces, Miss Gale, they *are* so pasty."

"Indeed!" says Rhoda, pricking up her ears.

"Nurse no false hopes of an epidemic; this is not an infirmary in a wood, Miss Gale," said Vizard. "My sister is a great colorist, and pitches her expectations

too high. I dare say their faces are not more pasty than usual; but this is a show place, and looks like a garden; so Zoe wants the boys to be poppies and pansies, and the girls roses and lilies. Which — they — are — not."

"All I know is," said Zoe, resolutely, "that in Islip the children's faces are rosy; but here they are pasty — dreadfully pasty."

"Well, you have got a box of colors; we will come up some day, and tint all the putty-faced boys." It was to Miss Dover the company owed this suggestion.

"No," said Rhoda. "Their faces are my business. I'll soon fix them; she didn't say putty-faced, she said pasty."

"Grateful to you for the distinction, Miss Gale," said Zoe.

Miss Gale proceeded to insist that boys are not pasty-faced without a cause, and it is to be sought lower down. "Ah!" cried she, suddenly, "is that a cherry that I see before me? No, a million. They steal them and eat them by the thousand, and that's why. Tell the truth now, everybody — they eat the stones?"

Miss Vizard said she did not know, but thought them capable.

"Children know nothing," said Vizard. "Please address all future scientific inquiries to an 'old inhabitant.' Miss Gale, the country abounds in curiosities; but, amongst those curiosities, even Science with her searching eye has never yet discovered an unswallowed cherry-stone in Hillstoke village."

"What! not on the trees?"

"She is too much for me. Drive on, coachman, and drown her replies in the clatter of hoofs. Round by the Stag, Zoe. I am uneasy till I have locked fair Science up. I own it is a mean way of getting rid of a troublesome disputant."

"Now I think it is quite fair," said Fanny. "She shuts you up, and so you lock her up."

"'Tis well," said Vizard, dolefully. "Now I am No. 3 —I who used to retort and keep girls in their places — with difficulty. Here is Ned Severne, too, reduced to silence. Why, where's your tongue? Miss Gale, you would hardly believe it, this is our chatterbox. We have been days and days, and could not get in a word edgeways for him. But now all he can do is to gaze on you with canine devotion, and devour the honey — I beg pardon, the lime-juice — of your lips. I warn you of one thing, though; there is such a thing as a threatening silence. He is evidently booking every word you utter; and he will deliver it all, for his own, behind your back some fine day."

With this sort of banter and small-talk not worth deluging the reader dead with, they passed away the time till they reached the farm.

"You stay here," said Vizard — "all but Zoe. Tom and George, get the things out." The grooms had already jumped out of the dog-cart, and two were at the horses' heads. The step-ladder was placed for Zoe, and Vizard asked her to go in and see the rooms were all right, while he took Miss Gale to the stables. He did so, and showed her a spirited Galloway, and a steady old horse, and told her she could ride one and drive the other all over the country.

She thanked him, but said her attention would be occupied by the two villages first, and she should make him a report in forty-eight hours.

"As you please," said he; "you are terribly in earnest."

"What should I be worth, if I was not?"

"Well, come and see your shell; and you must tell me if we have forgotten anything essential to your comfort."

She followed him, and he led her to a wing of the farmhouse, comparatively new, and quite superior to the rest. Here were two good sunny rooms, with windows looking south and west, and they were both papered with a white watered pattern, and a pretty French border of flowers at the upper part, to look gay and cheerful.

Zoe was in the bedroom arranging things, with a pretty air of hospitality. It was cheerily fitted up, and a fire of beech-logs blazing.

"How good you are!" said Rhoda, looking wistfully at her. But Zoe checked all comments by asking her to look at the sitting-room, and see if it would do. Rhoda would rather have stayed with Zoe; but she complied, and found another bright cheerful room, and Vizard standing in the middle of it. There was another beech-fire blazing, though it was hot weather. Here was a round table, with a large pot full of flowers, geraniums and musk-flowers outside, with the sun gilding their green leaves most amiably, and everything unpretending, but bright and comfortable; well-padded sofa, luxurious arm-chair, standing-up reading-desk, and a very large knee-hole table; a fine mirror from the ceiling to the dado; a book-case with choice books, and on a pembroke table near the wall were several periodicals. Rhoda, after a cursory survey of the room, flew to the books. "Oh," said she, "what good books! all standard works; and several on medicine; and, I declare, the last numbers of the 'Lancet' and the 'Medical Gazette,' and the very best French and German periodicals! Oh, what have I done? and what can I ever do?"

"What! Are *you* going to gush like the rest — and about nothing?" said Vizard: "then I'm off; come along, Zoe," and he hurried his sister away.

She came at the word; but as soon as they were out of the house, asked him what was the matter.

"I thought she was going to gush. But I dare say it was a false alarm."

"And why shouldn't she gush, when you have been so kind?"

"Pooh! nonsense! I have not been kind to her, and don't mean to be kind to her or to any woman; besides, she must not be allowed to gush: she is the parish virago — imported from vast distances as such — and for her to play the woman would be an abominable breach of faith. We have got our gusher, likewise our flirt; and it was understood from the first that this was to be a new *dramatis persona* — was not to be a repetition of you or *la* Dover, but — ahem! — the third grace, a virago: solidified vinegar."

Rhoda Gale felt very happy. She was young, healthy, ambitious, and sanguine. She divined that somehow her turning-point had come; and when she contrasted her condition a month ago, and the hardness of the world, with the comfort and kindness that now surrounded her, and the magnanimity which fled, not to be thanked for them, she felt for once in a way humble as well as grateful, and said to herself — "It is not to myself nor any merit of mine I owe such a change as all this is."

She went into the kitchen, ordered tea, bread and butter, and one egg, for dinner, at seven o'clock, and walked instantly back to Hillstoke to inspect the village, according to her ideas of inspection.

Next morning down came the bailiff's head man in his light cart, and a note was delivered to Vizard at the breakfast-table. He read it to himself, then proclaimed silence, and read it aloud.

DEAR SIR, — As we crossed your hall to luncheon there was the door of a small room half open, and I saw a large mahogany case standing on a marble table with one leg, but three claws gilt. I saw "Micro" printed on the case. So I hope it

is a microscope, and a fine one. To enable you to find it if you don't know, the room had crimson curtains, and is papered in green flock. That is the worst of all the poisonous papers; because the texture is loose, and the poisonous stuff easily detached, and always flying about the room. I hope you do not sit in it, nor Miss Vizard, because sitting in that room is courting death. Please lend me the microscope, if it is one, and I'll soon show you why the boys are putty-faced. I have inspected them, and find Miss Dover's epithet more exact than Miss Vizard's, which is singular. I will take great care of it.

Yours respectfully,

RHODA GALE.

Vizard ordered a servant to deliver the microscope to Miss Gale's messenger with his compliments. Fanny wondered what she wanted with it. "Not to inspect our little characters, it is to be hoped," said Vizard. "Why not pay her a visit, you ladies? then she will tell you, perhaps." The ladies instantly wore that bland look of inert but rocky resistance I have already noted as a characteristic of "our girls." Vizard saw and said, "Try and persuade them, Uxmoor."

"I can only offer Miss Vizard my escort," said Lord Uxmoor.

"And I offer both ladies mine," said Ned Severne, rather loud, and with a little sneer, to mark his superior breeding. The gentleman was so extremely polite in general, that there was no mistaking his hostile intentions now. The inevitable war had begun, and the first shot was fired. Of course the wonder was, it had not come long before; and perhaps I ought to have drawn more attention to the delicacy and tact of Zoe Vizard, which had averted it for a time. To be sure, she had been aided by the size of the house and its habits. The ladies had their own sitting-rooms; Fanny kept close to Zoe by special orders; and nobody could get a chance

*tête-à-tête* with Zoe unless she chose. By this means, by her native dignity and watchful tact, by her frank courtesy to Uxmoor, and by the many little quiet ways she took to show Severne her sentiments remained unchanged, she had managed to keep the peace, and avert that open competition for her favor, which would have tickled the vanity of a Fanny Dover, but shocked the refined modesty of a Zoe Vizard.

But Nature will have her way, soon or late; and it is the nature of males to fight for the female.

At Severne's shot Uxmoor drew up a little haughtily, but did not feel sure anything was intended. He was little accustomed to rubs. Zoe, on the other hand, turned a little pale — just a little; for she was sorry, but not surprised; so she proved equal to the occasion; she smiled and made light of it. "Of course, we are *all* going," said she.

"Except one," said Vizard, dryly.

"That is too bad," said Fanny. "Here he drives us all to visit his blue-stocking, but he takes good care not to go himself."

"Perhaps he prefers to visit her alone," suggested Severne. Zoe looked alarmed.

"That is *so*," said Vizard. "Observe, I am learning her very phrases. When you come back, tell me every word she says; pray let nothing be lost that falls from my virago."

The party started after luncheon; and Severne, true to his new policy, whipped to Zoe's side before Uxmoor, and engaged her at once in conversation.

Uxmoor bit his lip, and fell to Fanny. Fanny saw at once what was going on, and made herself very agreeable to Uxmoor. He was polite, and a little gratified, but cast uneasy glances at the other pair.

Meantime Severne was improving his opportunity.

"Sorry to disturb Lord Uxmoor's monopoly," said he, sarcastically; "but I could not bear it any longer."

"I do not object to the change," said Zoe, smiling maternally on him; "but you will be good enough to imitate me in one thing — you will always be polite to Lord Uxmoor."

"He makes it rather hard."

"It is only for a time; and we must all learn to be capable of self-denial. I assure you I have exercised quite as much as I ask of you. Edward, he is a gentleman of great worth, universally respected, and my brother has a particular wish to be friends with him. So pray be patient; be considerate. Have a little faith in one who" —

She did not end the sentence.

"Well, I will," said he. "But please think of me a little. I am beginning to feel quite thrust aside, and degraded in my own eyes for putting up with it."

"For shame to talk so!" said Zoe; but the tears came into her eyes.

The master of arts saw, and said no more. He had the art of not overdoing: he left the arrow to rankle. He walked by her side in silence for ever so long. Then, suddenly, as if by a mighty effort of unselfish love, went off into delightful discourse. He cooed and wooed, and flattered, and fascinated; and by the time they reached the farm, had driven Uxmoor out of her head.

Miss Gale was out. The farmer's wife said she had gone into the town — meaning Hillstoke — which was, strictly speaking, a hamlet, or tributary village. Hillstoke Church was only twelve years old, and the tithes of the place went to the parson of Islip.

When Zoe turned to go, Uxmoor seized the opportunity, and drew up beside her, like a soldier falling into the ranks. Zoe felt hot; but as Severne took no open

notice, she could not help smiling at the behavior of the fellows; and Uxmoor got his chance.

Severne turned to Fanny, with a wicked sneer. "Very well, my lord," said he: "but I have put a spoke in your wheel."

"As if I did not see, you clever creature!" said Fanny, admiringly.

"Ah, Miss Dover, I need to be as clever as you. See what I have against me: a rich lord, with the bushiest beard."

"Never you mind," said Fanny. "Good wine needs no bush, ha! ha! You are lovely and have a wheedling tongue, and you were there first. Be good, now — and you can flirt with me to fill up the time. I hate not being flirted at. It is stagnation."

"Yes, but it is not so easy to flirt with you just a little. You are so charming." Thereupon he proceeded to flatter her, and wonder how he had escaped a passionate attachment to so brilliant a creature. "What saved me," said he oracularly, "is, that I never could love two at once; and Zoe seized my love at sight. She left me nothing to lay at your feet but my admiration, the tenderest friendship man can feel for woman, and my life-long gratitude for fighting my battle. Oh, Miss Dover, I must be quite serious a moment. What other lady but you would be so generous as to befriend a poor man with another lady, when there's wealth and title on the other side?"

Fanny blushed and softened, but turned it off. "There — no heroics, please," said she. "You are a dear little fellow; and don't go and be jealous, for he shan't have her. He would never ask me to his house, you know. Now I think you would, perhaps — who knows? Tell me, fascinating monster, are you going to be ungrateful?"

"Not to you. My home would always be yours; and

you know it." And he caught her hand, and kissed it in an ungovernable transport, the strings of which he pulled himself. He took care to be quick about it though, and not let Zoe or Uxmoor see, who were walking on before, and behaving sedately.

In Hillstoke lived, on a pension from Vizard, old Mrs. Greenaway, rheumatic about the lower joints, so she went on crutches; but she went fast, being vigorous, and so did her tongue. At Hillstoke she was Dame Greenaway, being a relic of that generation which applied the word dame to every wife, high and low; but at Islip she was "Sally," because she had started under that title, fifty-five years ago, as housemaid at Vizard Court, and, by the tenacity of oral tradition, retained it ever since, in spite of two husbands she had wedded and buried with equal composure.

Her feet were still springy, her arms strong as iron, and her crutches active. At sight of our party she came out with amazing wooden strides, agog for gossip, and met them at the gate. She managed to indicate a courtesy, and said, "Good day, miss: your sarvant, all the company. Lord, how nice you be dressed, all on ye! to — be — sure. Well, miss, have ye heerd the news?"

"No, Sally. What is it?"

"What! haant ye heerd about the young 'oman at the farm?"

"Oh, yes; we came to see her."

"No, did ye now? Well, she was here not half an hour agone. By the same toaken, I did put her a question, and she answered me then and there."

"And may I ask what the question was?"

"And welcome, miss. I said, says I, 'Young 'oman, where be you come from?' so says she, 'Old 'oman, I be come from forin parts.' 'I thought as much,' says I. 'And what be'e come *for?*' 'To sojourn here,' says she,

which she meant to bide a time. 'And what de'e count to do whilst here you be?' says I. Says she, 'As much good as ever I can do, and as little harm.' 'That is no answer,' says I. She said it would do for the present; 'and good day to you, ma'am,' says she. 'Your sarvant, miss,' says I; and she was off like a flash. But I called my grandson Bill, and I told him he must follow her, go where she would, and let us know what she was up to down in Islip. Then I went round the neighbors, and one told me one tale, and another another. But it all comes to one — we have gotten a BUSYBODY; that's the name I gives her. She don't give in to that, ye know; she is a Latiner, and speaks accordin. She gave Master Giles her own description. Says she, 'I'm suspector-general of this here districk.' So then Giles he was skeared a bit — he have got an acre of land of his own, you know — and he up and asked her did she come under the taxes, or was she a fresh imposition; 'for we are burdened enough a'ready, no offence to you, miss,' says Josh Giles. 'Don't you be skeared, old man,' says she, 'I shan't cost *you* none; your betters pays for I.' So says Giles, 'Oh, if you falls on Squire I don't vally that; Squire's back is broad enough to bear the load, but I'm a poor man.' That's how a' goes on, ye know. Poverty is always in his mouth; but the old chap have got a hatful of money hid away in the thatch or some're, only he haant a got the heart to spend it."

"Tell us more about the young lady," asked Uxmoor.

"What young lady? Oh, *her!* She is not a young lady — leastways she is not dressed like one, but like a plain, decent body. She was all of a piece — blue serge! Bless your heart! the peddlers bring it round here at elevenpence halfpenny the yard, and a good breadth too; and plain boots, not heeled like yourn, miss, nor yourn, ma'am; and a felt hat like a boy. You'd say the parish

had dressed her for ten shillings, and got a pot of beer out on't."

"Well, never mind that," said Zoe; "I must tell you she is a very worthy young lady, and my brother has a respect for her. Dress? Why, Sally, you know it is not the wisest that spend most on dress. You might tell us what she *does*."

Dame Greenaway snatched the word out of her mouth. "Well, then, miss, what she have done, she have suspected everything. She have suspected the ponds; she have suspected the houses; she have suspected the folk; she must know what they eat and drink and wear next their very skin, and what they do lie down on. She have been at the very boys and forbade 'em to swallow the cherry-stones, poor things; but old Mrs. Nash — which her boys lives on cherries at this time o' year, and to be sure they are a godsend to keep the children hereabout from starving — well, Dame Nash told her the Almighty knew best; He had put 'em together on the tree, so why not in the boys' insides? and that was common sense, to my mind. But, la! she wouldn't hear it. She said, 'Then you'd eat the peach-stones by that rule, and the fish-bones and all.' Says she, quite resolute-like, 'I forbid 'em to swallow the stones;' and says she, 'ye mawnt gainsay me, none on ye, for I be the new doctor.' So then it all come out. She isn't suspector-general; she is a wench turned doctor, which it is against reason. Shan't doctor *me*, for one; but that there old Giles, he says he is agreeable, if so be she wool doctor him cheap — cussed old fool! — as if any doctoring was cheap that kills a body and doan't cure 'em. Dear heart, I forgot to tell ye about the ponds. Well, you know there be no wells here. We makes our tea out of the ponds, and capital good tea to drink, far before well-water, for I mind that one day about twenty years agone, some interfering body

did cart a barrel up from Islip, and 'twas main tasteless; and if we wants water withouten tea, why we can get plenty on't, and none too much malt and hops, at 'The Black Horse.' So this here young 'oman she suspects the poor ponds, and casts a hevil eye on them, and she borrows two mugs of Giles, and carries the water home to suspect it closer. That is all she have done at present, but you see she haant been here so very long. You mark my words, miss; that young 'oman will turn Hillstoke village topsy-turvy or ever she goes back to London town."

"Nonsense, Sally," said Zoe; "how can anybody do that whilst my brother and I are alive?" She then slipped half-a-crown into Sally's hand, and led the way to Islip.

On the road her conversation with Uxmoor took a turn suggestive of this interview. I forget which began it; but they differed a little in opinion, Uxmoor admiring Miss Gale's zeal and activity, and Zoe fearing that she would prove a rash reformer, perhaps a reckless innovator.

"And really," said she, "why disturb things? for, go where I will, I see no such paradise as these two villages."

"They are indeed lovely," said Uxmoor; "but my own village is very pretty. Yet on nearer inspection I have found so many defects, especially in the internal arrangements of the cottages, that I am always glad to hear of a new eye having come to bear on any village."

"I know you are very good," said Zoe, "and wish all the poor people about you to be as healthy and as happy as possible."

"I really do," said Uxmoor, warmly. "I often think of the strange inequality in the lot of men. Living in the country, I see around me hundreds of men who are by nature as worthy as I am, or thereabouts. Yet they

must toil and labor, and indeed fight for bare food and clothing all their lives, and worse off at the close of their long labor. That is what grieves me to the heart. All this time I revel in plenty and luxuries — not forgetting the luxury of luxuries, the delight of giving to those who need and deserve. What have I done for all this? I have been born of the right parents. My merit, then, is the accident of an accident. But having done nothing meritorious before I was born, surely I ought to begin afterwards. I think a man born to wealth ought to doubt his moral title to it, and ought to set to work to prove it — ought to set himself to repair the injustice of fortune by which he profits. Yes, such a man should be a sort of human sunshine and diffuse blessings all round him. The poor man, that encounters him, ought to bless the accident. But there, I am not eloquent. You know how much more I mean than I can say."

"Indeed I do," said Zoe, "and I honor you."

"Ah, Miss Vizard," said Uxmoor, "that is more than I can ever deserve."

"You are praising me at your own expense," said Zoe. "Well, then," said she, sweetly, "please accept my sympathy. It is so rare to find a gentleman of your age thinking so little of himself and so much of poor people. Yet that is a divine command. But somehow we forget our religion, out of church — most of us. I am sure I do, for one."

This conversation brought them to the village, and there they met Vizard, and Zoe repeated old Sally's discourse to him word for word. He shook his head solemnly, and said he shared her misgivings. "We have caught a Tartar."

On arriving at Vizard Court, they found Miss Gale had called and left two cards.

Open rivalry having now commenced between Uxmoor

and Severne, his lordship was adroit enough to contrive that the drag should be in request next day.

Then Severne got Fanny to convey a note to Zoe, imploring her to open her bedroom window and say good-night to him the last. "For," said he, "I have no coach-and-four, and I am very unhappy."

This and his staying sullenly at home spoilt Zoe's ride, and she was cool to Uxmoor, and spoilt his drive.

At night Zoe peeped through the curtain and saw Severne standing in the moonlight. Her eye drank him in for some time in silence, then she softly opened her window and looked out. He took a step nearer.

She said very softly and tenderly, "You are very naughty and very foolish. Go to bed *di*rectly." And she closed her window with a valiant slam; then sat down and sighed.

Same game next day. Uxmoor driving; Zoe wonderfully polite, but chill; because he was separating her and Severne. At night, Severne on the wet grass, and Zoe remonstrating severely, but not sincerely, and closing the window peremptorily she would have liked to keep open half the night.

It has often been remarked that great things arise out of small things; and sometimes, when in full motion, depend on small things. History offers brilliant examples upon its large stage. Fiction has imitated history in *un verre d'eau* and other compositions. To these examples, real or feigned, I am now about to add one; and the curious reader may, if he thinks it worth while, note the various ramifications at home and abroad of a seemingly trivial incident.

They were all seated at luncheon, when a servant came in with a salver, and said, "A gentleman to see you, sir." He presented his salver with a card upon it. Severne clutched the card, and jumped up reddening.

"Show him in here," said the hospitable Vizard.

"No, no," cried Severne, rather nervously; "it is my lawyer on a little private business."

Vizard told the servant to show the visitor into the library, and take in the madeira and some biscuits.

"It is about a lease," said Ned Severne, and went out rather hurriedly.

"La!" said Fanny, "what a curious name!—Poikilus. And what does S. I. mean, I wonder?"

"This is enigmatical discourse," said Vizard, dryly. "Please explain."

"Why, the card had Poikilus on it."

"You are very inquisitive," said Zoe, coloring.

"No more than my neighbors. But the man put his salver right between our noses, and how could I help seeing Poikilus in large letters, and S. I. in little ones up in the corner?"

Said Vizard, "The female eye is naturally swift. She couldn't help seeing all that in *half a moment of time;* for Ned Severne snatched up the card with vast expedition."

"I saw that too," said Fanny, defiantly.

Uxmoor put in his word. "Poikilus! That is a name one sees in the papers."

"Of course you do. He is one of the humbugs of the day. Pretends to find things out; advertises mysterious disappearances; offers a magnificent reward — with perfect safety, because he has invented the lost girl's features, and dress, and her disappearance into the bargain; — and I hold with the schoolmen, that she who does not exist cannot disappear. Poikilus, a puffing detective. S. I., Secret Inquiry. *I* spell Enquiry with an E, — but Poikilus is a man of the day. What the deuce can Ned Severne want of him? I suppose I ought not to object. I have established a female detective at

Hillstoke. So Ned sets up one at Islip. I shall make my own secret arrangements. If Poikilus settles here, he will be drawn through the horse-pond by small-minded rustics once a week."

Whilst he was going on like this, Zoe felt uncomfortable, and almost irritated by his volubility, and it was a relief to her when Severne returned. He had confided a most delicate case to the detective, given him written instructions, and stipulated for his leaving the house without a word to any one, and, indeed, seen him off, — all in seven minutes. Yet he returned to our party cool as a cucumber, to throw dust in everybody's eyes.

"I must apologize for this intrusion," he said to Vizard; "but my lawyer wanted to consult me about the lease of one of my farms, and finding himself in the neighborhood, he called instead of writing."

"Your lawyer, eh?" said Vizard, slyly. "What is your lawyer's name?"

"Jackson," said Ned, without a moment's hesitation.

Fanny giggled in her own despite.

Instead of stopping here, Severne must go on; it was his unlucky day.

"Not quite a gentleman, you know, or I would have inflicted his society on you."

"Not quite — eh?" said Harrington, so dryly, that Fanny Dover burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter.

But Zoe turned hot and cold, to see him blundering thus, and telling lie upon lie.

Severne saw there was something wrong, and buried his nose in pigeon-pie. He devoured it with an excellent appetite, while every eye rested on him: Zoe's, with shame and misery: Uxmoor's, with open contempt; Vizard's, with good-humored satire.

The situation became intolerable to Zoe Vizard. Indignant and deeply shocked herself, she still could

not bear to see him the butt of others' ridicule and contempt. She rose haughtily, and marched to the door. He raised his head for a moment, as she went out. She turned, and their eyes met. She gave him such a glance of pity and disdain, as suspended the meat upon his fork, and froze him into comprehending that something very serious indeed had happened.

He resolved to learn from Fanny what it was, and act accordingly. But Zoe's maid came in and whispered Fanny. She went out, and neither of the young ladies was seen till dinner-time. It was conveyed to Uxmoor that there would be no excursion of any kind this afternoon: and therefore he took his hat, and went off to pay a visit. He called on Rhoda Gale. She was at home. He intended merely to offer her his respects, and to side with her generally against these foolish rustics; but she was pleased with him for coming, and made herself so agreeable, that he spent the whole afternoon comparing notes with her upon village life, and the amelioration it was capable of. Each could give the other valuable ideas; and he said he hoped she would visit his part of the country ere long; she would find many defects, but also a great desire to amend them.

This flattered her, naturally; and she began to take an interest in him. That interest soon took the form of curiosity. She must know whether he was seriously courting Zoe Vizard or not. The natural reserve of a well-bred man withstood this at first; but that armor could not resist for two mortal hours such a daughter of Eve as this, with her insidious questions, her artful statements, her cat-like retreats and cat-like returns. She learned — though he did not see how far he had committed himself — that he admired Zoe Vizard, and would marry her to-morrow if she would have him: his hesitation to ask her, because he had a rival, whose power he

could not exactly measure; but a formidable and permitted rival.

They parted almost friends; and Rhoda settled quietly in her mind he should have Zoe Vizard, since he was so fond of her.

Here again it was Severne's unlucky day, and Uxmoor's lucky. To carry this same day to a close, Severne tried more than once to get near Zoe and ask if he had offended her, and in what. But no opportunity occurred. So then he sat and gazed at her, and looked unhappy. She saw, and was not unmoved, but would not do more than glance at him. He resigned himself to wait till night.

Night came. He went on the grass. There was a light in Zoe's room. It was eleven o'clock. He waited, shivering, till twelve. Then the light was put out; but no window opened. There was a moon; and her windows glared black on him, dark and bright as the eyes she now averted from him. He was in disgrace.

The present incident I have recorded did not end here, and I must now follow Poikilus on his mission to Homburg; and, if the reader has a sense of justice, methinks he will not complain of the journey, for see how long I have neglected the noblest figure in this story, and the most to be pitied. To desert her longer would be too unjust, and derange entirely the balance of this complicated story.

## CHAPTER XX.

A CRUEL mental stroke, like a heavy blow upon the body, sometimes benumbs and sickens at first, but does not torture; yet that is to follow.

It was so with Ina Klosking. The day she just missed Edward Severne, and he seemed to melt away from her very grasp into the wide world again, she could drag herself to the theatre and sing angelically, with a dull and aching heart. But next day her heart entered on sharper suffering; she was irritated, exasperated; chained to the theatre, to Homburg, yet wild to follow Severne to England without delay. She told Ashmead she must and would go. He opposed it stoutly, and gave good reasons. She could not break faith with the management. England was a large place. They had, as yet, no clew but a name. By waiting, the clew would come. The sure course was to give publicity in England to her winnings, and so draw Severne to her.

But, for once, she was too excited to listen to reason. She was tempest-tossed. "I *will* go — I *will* go," she repeated, as she walked the room wildly, and flung her arms aloft with reckless *abandon*, and yet, with a terrible majesty, an instinctive grace, and all the poetry of a great soul wronged, and driven wild.

She overpowered Ashmead, and drove him to the director; he went most unwillingly; but, once there, was true to her, and begged off the engagement eagerly. The director refused this plump. Then Ashmead, still true to his commission, offered him (most reluctantly) a considerable sum down to annul the contract, and backed

this with a quiet hint that she would certainly fall ill if refused. The director knew by experience what this meant, and how easily these ladies can command the human body to death's door, *pro re nâta*, and how readily a doctor's certificate can be had to say or swear that the great creature cannot sing or act, without peril to life; though really both these arts are grand medicines, and far less likely to injure the *bona fide* sick, than are the certifying doctor's draughts and drugs. The director knew all this; but he was furious at the disappointment threatening him. "No," said he; "this is always the way; a poor devil of a manager is never to have a success. It is treacherous, it is ungrateful; I'll close. You tell her, if she is determined to cut all our throats, and kick her own good fortune down, she can; but, by ——, I'll make her smart for it. Mind, now; she closes the theatre, and pays the expenses, if she plays me false."

"But if she is ill?"

"Let her die and be ——, and then I'll believe her. She is the healthiest woman in Germany. I'll go and take steps to have her arrested, if she offers to leave the town."

Ashmead reported the manager's threats, and the Klosking received them as a lioness the barking of a cur. She drew herself swiftly up, and her great eye gleamed imperial disdain at all his menaces but one.

"He will not really close the theatre," said she loftily, but uneasiness lurked in her manner.

"He will," said Ashmead. "He is desperate; and you know it *is* hard, to go on losing and losing, and then, the moment luck turns, be done out of it, in spite of a written bargain. I've been a manager myself."

"So many poor people!" said Ina with a sigh, and her defiant head sank a little.

"Oh, bother *them!*" said Ashmead craftily. "Let 'em starve."

"God forbid!" said Ina. Then she sighed again, and her queenly head sank lower. Then she faltered out, "I have the will to break faith and ruin poor people, but I have not the courage."

Then a tear or two began to trickle, carrying with them all the egotistical resolution Ina Klosking possessed at that time. Perhaps we shall see her harden; nothing stands still.

This time the poor conquered.

But every now and then, for many days, there were returns of torment and agitation, and wild desire to escape to England.

Ashmead made head against these with his simple arts. For one thing, he showed her a dozen paragraphs in MS. he was sending to as many English weekly papers, describing her heavy gains at the table. "With these stones," said he, "I kill two birds: extend your fame, and entice your idol back to you." Here a growl, which I suspect was an inarticulate curse. Joseph, fie!

The pen of Joseph, on such occasions, was like his predecessor's coat, polychromatic. The Klosking read him, and wondered. "Alas!" said she, "with what versatile skill do you descant on a single circumstance, not very creditable!"

"Creditable!" said Ashmead; "it was very naughty, but it is very nice." And the creature actually winked, forgetting, of course, whom he was winking at, and wasting his vulgarity on the desert air; for the Klosking's eye might just manage to blink — at the meridian sun, or so forth, but it never winked once in all its life. One of the paragraphs ran thus, with a heading in small capitals: —

"A Prima Donna at the Gaming-Table.

"Mademoiselle Klosking, the great contralto, whose success has been already recorded in all the journals, strolled, on one

of her off-nights, into the Kursaal at Homburg, and sat down to *trente et quarante*. Her melodious voice was soon heard betting heavily, with the most engaging sweetness of manner; and, doubling seven times upon the red, she broke the bank, and retired with a charming courtesy, and eight thousand pounds in gold and notes."

Another dealt with the matter thus: —

"Rouge et Noir.

"The latest *coup* at Homburg has been made by a cantatrice, whose praises all Germany are now ringing. Mademoiselle Klosking, successor and rival of Alboni, went to the Kursaal, *pour passer le temps;* and she passed it so well, that in half an hour the bank was broken, and there was a pile of notes and gold before La Klosking, amounting to ten thousand pounds and more. The lady waved these over to her agent, Mr. Joseph Ashmead, with a hand which, *par parenthèse*, is believed to be the whitest in Europe, and retired gracefully."

On perusing this, La Klosking held *two* white hands up to heaven in amazement at the skill and good taste which had dragged this feature into the incident.

"A Dramatic Situation.

"A circumstance has lately occurred here which will infallibly be seized on by the novelists in search of an incident. Mademoiselle Klosking, the new contralto, whose triumphant progress through Europe will probably be the next event in music, walked into the Kursaal the other night, broke the bank, and walked out again with twelve thousand pounds, and that charming composure which is said to distinguish her in private life.

"What makes it more remarkable is, that the lady is not a gamester, has never played before, and is said to have declared that she shall never play again. It is certain that with such a face, figure, and voice, as hers, she need never seek for wealth at the gambling-table. Mademoselle Klosking is now in negotiation with all the principal cities of the Continent. But the

English managers, we apprehend, will prove awkward competitors."

Were I to reproduce the nine other paragraphs, it would be a very curious, instructive, and tedious specimen of literature; and, who knows, I might corrupt some immaculate soul, inspire some actor or actress, singer or songstress, with an itch for public self-laudation, a foible from which they are all at present so free? Witness the "Era," the "Hornet," and "Figaro."

Ina Klosking spotted what she conceived to be a defect in these histories. "My friend," said she, meekly, "the sum I won was under five thousand pounds."

"Was it? Yes, to be sure. But you see these are English advertisements. Now England is so rich, that, if you keep down to any *Continental* sum, you give a false impression in England of the importance on the spot."

"And so we are to falsify figures? In the first of these legends it was double the truth: and, as I read, it enlarges — oh, but it enlarges," said Ina, with a Gallicism we shall have to forgive in a lady who spoke five languages.

"Madam," said Ashmead, dryly, "you must expect your capital to increase rapidly, so long as I conduct it."

Not being herself swift to shed jokes, Ina did not take them rapidly. She stared at him. He never moved a muscle. She gave a slight shrug of her grand shoulders, and resigned that attempt to reason with the creature.

She had a pill in store for him, though. She told him that as she had sacrificed the longings of her heart to the poor of the theatre, so she should sacrifice a portion of her ill-gotten gains to the poor of the town.

He made a hideously wry face at that; asked what poor-rates were for? and assured her that "pauper" meant "drunkard."

"It is not written so in Scripture," said Ina: "and I need their prayers; for I am very unhappy."

In short, Ashmead was driven out from the presence-chamber, with a thousand thalers to distribute amongst the poor of Homburg; and, once in the street, his face did not shine like an angel's of mercy, but was very pinched and morose; hardly recognizable — poor Joe!

By-and-by he scratched his head. Now it is unaccountable; but certain heads often yield an idea in return for that. Joseph's did, and his countenance brightened.

Three days after this, Ina was surprised by a note from the burgomaster, saying that he and certain of the town-council would have the honor of calling on her at noon.

What might this mean?

She sent to ask for Mr. Ashmead; he was not to be found; he had hidden himself too carefully.

The deputation came and thanked her for her munificent act of charity.

She looked puzzled at first, then blushed to the temples. "Munificent act, gentlemen! Alas! I did but direct my agent to distribute a small sum amongst the deserving poor. He has done very ill to court your attention. My little contribution should have been as private as it is insignificant."

"Nay, madam," said the clerk of the council, who was a recognized orator, "your agent did well to consult our worthy burgomaster, who knows the persons most in need and most deserving. We do not doubt that you love to do good in secret. Nevertheless we have also our sense of duty, and we think it right that so benevolent an act should be published, as an example to others. In the same view, we claim to comment publicly on your goodness." Then he looked to the burgomaster, who took him up.

"And we comment thus: Madam, since the middle

ages the freedom of this town has not been possessed by any female. There is, however, no law forbidding it; and, therefore, madam, the civic authorities, whom I represent, do hereby present to you the freedom of this burgh."

He then handed her an emblazoned vellum giving her citizenship, with the reasons written plainly in golden letters.

Ina Klosking, who had remained quite quiet during the speeches, waited a moment or two; and then replied with seemly grace and dignity: —

"Mr. Burgomaster and gentlemen — you have paid me a great and unexpected compliment: and I thank you for it. But one thing makes me uneasy; it is that I have done so little to deserve this. I console myself, however, by reflecting that I am still young, and may have opportunities to show myself grateful, and even to deserve, in the future, this honor, which at presents overpays me, and almost oppresses me. On that understanding, gentlemen, be pleased to bestow, and let me receive, the rare compliment you have paid me by admitting me to citizenship in your delightful town. (To herself) I'll scold him well for this!"

Low courtesy; profound bows; exit deputation enchanted with her; *manet* Klosking with the freedom of the city in her hand, and ingratitude in her heart; for her one idea was to get hold of Mr. Joseph Ashmead directly, and reproach him severely for all this, which she justly ascribed to his machinations.

The cunning Ashmead divined her project, and kept persistently out of her way. That did not suit her neither. She was lonely. She gave the waiter a friendly line to bring him to her. Now, mind you, she was too honest to pretend she was not going to scold him. So this is what she wrote: —

My Friend, — Have you deserted me? Come to me, and be remonstrated. What have you to fear? You know so well how to defend yourself.

Ina Klosking.

Arrived in a very few minutes Mr. Ashmead, jaunty, cheerful, and defensive.

Ina, with a countenance from which all discontent was artfully extracted, laid before him, in the friendliest way you can imagine, an English Bible. It was her father's, and she always carried it with her. "I wish," said she, insidiously, "to consult you on a passage or two of this book. How do you understand this? —

"'When thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do.'

"And this? —

"When thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: that thine alms may be in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.'"

Having pointed out these sentences with her finger, she looked at him for his interpretation. Joseph, thus erected into a Scripture commentator, looked at the passages first near, and then afar off, as if the true interpretation depended on perspective. Having thus gained a little time, he said: "Well, I think the meaning is clear enough. We are to hide our own light under a bushel. But it don't say an agent is to hide his employer's."

"Be serious, sir. This is a great authority."

"Oh, of course, of course. Still — if you won't be offended, ma'am — times are changed since then. It was a very small place, where news spread of itself; and all that cannot be written for theatrical agents, because there wasn't one in creation."

"And so now, their little customs, lately invented, like themselves, are to prevail against God's im-mor-tal law!" It was something half-way between Handel and mellowed thunder, the way her grand contralto suddenly rolled out these three words. Joseph was cunning. He put on a crushed appearance — deceived by which, the firm but gentle Klosking began to soften her tone directly.

"It has given me pain," said she, sorrowfully. "And I am afraid God will be angry with us both for our ostentation."

"Not He," said Joseph, consolingly. "Bless your heart, He is not half so irritable as the parsons fancy! They confound Him with themselves."

Ina ignored this suggestion with perfect dignity, and flowed on: "All I stipulate now is, that I may not see this pitiable parade in print."

"That is past praying for, then," said Ashmead, resolutely. "You might as well try to stop the waves as check publicity — in our day. Your munificence to the poor — confound the lazy lot! — and the gratitude of those pompous prigs, the deputation — the presentation — your admirable reply" —

"You never heard it, now" —

"Which, as you say, I was not so fortunate as to hear, and so must content myself with describing it, — all this is flying north, south, east, and west."

"Oh, no, no, no! You have not *advertised* it."

"Not advertised it? For what do you take me? Wait till you see the bill I am running up against you. Madam, you must take people as they are. Don't try to un-Ashmead *me;* it is impossible. Catch up that knife and kill me. I'll not resist; on the contrary, I'll sit down and prepare an obituary notice for the weeklies, and say I killed *myself.* But WHILST I BREATHE I ADVERTISE."

And Joseph was defiant; and the Klosking shrugged her noble shoulders, and said, "You best of creatures, you are incurable."

To follow this incident to its conclusion: not a week after this scene, Ina Klosking detected, in an English paper —

"A Charitable Act.

"Mademoiselle Klosking, the great contralto, having won a large sum of money at the Kursaal, has given a thousand pounds to the poor of the place. The civic authorities, hearing of this, and desirous to mark their sense of so noble a donation, have presented her with the freedom of the burgh, written on vellum and gold. Mademoiselle Klosking received the compliment with charming grace and courtesy; but her modesty is said to have been much distressed at the publicity hereby given to an act she wished to be known only to the persons relieved by her charity."

Ina caught the culprit, and showed him this. "A thousand pounds!" said she. "Are you not ashamed? Was ever a niggardly act so embellished and exaggerated? I feel my face very red, sir."

"I'll explain that in a moment," said Joseph, amicably. "Each nation has a coin it is always quoting. France counts in francs, Germany in thalers, America in dollars, England in pounds. When a thing costs a million francs in France, or a million dollars in the States, that is always called a million pounds in the English journals; otherwise it would convey no distinct idea at all to an Englishman. Turning thalers and francs into pounds — *that* is not *exaggeration;* it is only *translation.*"

Ina gave him such a look. He replied with an unabashed smile.

She shrugged her shoulders in silence this time, and, to the best of my belief, made no more serious attempts to un-Ashmead her Ashmead.

A month had now passed, and that was a little more than half the dreary time she had to wade through. She began to count the days, and that made her pine all the more. Time is like a kettle. Be blind to him, he flies; watch him, he lags. Her sweet temper was a little affected, and she even reproached Ashmead for holding her out false hopes that his advertisements of her gains would induce Severne to come to her, or even write. "No," said she; "there must be some greater attraction. Karl says that Miss Vizard, who called upon me, was a beauty, and dark. Perhaps she was the lovely girl I saw at the opera. She has never been there since; and he is gone to England with people of that name."

"Well, but that Miss Vizard called on you. She can't intend to steal him from you."

"But she may not know; a woman may injure another without intending. He may deceive her; he has betrayed me. Her extraordinary beauty terrifies me. It enchanted me; and how much more a man?"

Joseph said he thought this was all fancy; and, as for his advertisements, it was too early yet to pronounce on their effect.

The very day after this conversation, he bounced into her room in great dudgeon. "There, madam! the advertisements *have* produced an effect; and not a pleasant one. Here's a detective on to us. He is feeling his way with Karl. I knew the man in a moment — calls himself Poikilus in print, and Smith to talk to; but he is Aaron at the bottom of it all, and can speak several languages. Confound their impudence! putting a detective on to *us*, when it is them that are keeping dark."

"Who do you think has sent him?" asked Ina, intently.

"The party interested, I suppose."

"Interested in what?"

"Why, in the money you won; for he was drawing Karl about that."

"Then, *he* sent the man!" And Ina began to pant and change color.

"Well, now you put it to me, I think so. Come to look at it, it is certain. Who else *could* it be? Here is a brace of sweeps. They wouldn't be the worse for a good kicking. You say the word, and Smith shall have one, at all events."

"Alas, my friend!" said Ina, "for once you are slow. What! a messenger comes here direct from *him*, and are we so dull we can learn nothing from him who comes to question us? Let me think."

She leaned her forehead on her white hand, and her face seemed slowly to fill with intellectual power.

"That man," said she, at last, "is the only link between him and me. I must speak to him."

Then she thought again.

"No, not yet. He must be detained in the house. Letters may come to him, and their postmarks may give us some clew."

"I'll recommend the house to him."

"Oh, that is not necessary! He will lodge here of his own accord. Does he know you?"

"I think not."

"Do not give him the least suspicion that you know he is a detective."

"All right, I won't."

"If he sounds you about the money, say nobody knows much about it, except Mademoiselle Klosking. If you can get the matter so far, come and tell me. But be *you* very reserved, for you are not clear."

Ashmead received these instructions meekly, and went into the *salle à manger*, and ordered dinner. Smith was there, and had evidently got some information from

Karl, for he opened an easy conversation with Ashmead, and it ended in their dining together.

Smith played the open-handed countryman to the life; stood champagne. Ashmead chattered, and seemed quite off his guard. Smith approached the subject cautiously. "Gamble here as much as ever?"

"All day, some of them."

"Ladies and all?"

"Why, the ladies are the worst."

"No; are they, now? Ah, that reminds me. I heard there was a lady in this very house won a pot o' money."

"It is true. I am her agent."

"I suppose she lost it all next day?"

"Well, not all, for she gave a thousand pounds to the poor."

"The dressmakers collared the rest?"

"I cannot say. I have nothing to do, except with her theatrical business. She will make more by that than she ever made at play."

"What, is she tip-top?"

"The most rising singer in Europe."

"I should like to see her."

"That you can easily do. She sings to-night. I'll pass you in."

"You are a good fellow. Have a bit of supper with me afterwards. Bottle of fizz."

These two might be compared to a couple of spiders, each taking the other for a fly. Smith was enchanted with Ina's singing, or pretended. Ashmead was delighted with him, or pretended.

"Introduce me to her," said Smith.

"I dare not do that: you are not professional — are you?"

"No; but you can say I am, for a lark."

Ashmead said he should like to; but it would not do, unless he was very wary.

"Oh, I'm fly!" said the other. "She won't get anything out of me. I've been behind the scenes often enough."

Then Ashmead said he would go and ask her if he might present a London manager to her. He soon brought back the answer. "She is too tired to-night; but I pressed her, and she says she will be charmed if you breakfast with her to-morrow at eleven." He did not say that he was to be with her at half-past ten for special instructions. They were very simple. "My friend," said she, "I mean to tell this man something, which he will think it his duty to telegraph or write to *him* immediately. It was for this I would not have the man to supper, being after post-time. This morning he shall either write or telegraph; and then, if you are as clever in this as you are in some things, you will watch him, and find out the address he sends to."

Ashmead listened very attentively, and fell into a brown study.

"Madam," said he at last, "this is a first-rate combination. You make him communicate with England, and I will do the rest. If he telegraphs, I'll be at his heels. If he goes to the post, I know a way; if he posts in the house, he makes it too easy."

At eleven, Ashmead introduced his friend "Sharpus, manager of Drury Lane Theatre;" and watched the fencing-match with some anxiety, Ina being little versed in guile. But she had tact and self-possession; and she was not an angel, after all, but a woman whose wits were sharpened by love and suffering.

Sharpus, *alias* Smith, played his assumed character to perfection. He gave the Klosking many incidents of business, and professional anecdotes, and was excellent company. The Klosking was gracious, and more *bonne enfant* than Ashmead had ever seen her. It was a fine

match between her and the detective. At last he made his approaches.

"And I hear we are to congratulate you on success at *rouge et noir*, as well as opera. Is it true that you broke the bank?"

"Perfectly," was the frank reply.

"And won a million."

"More or less," said the Klosking, with an open smile.

"I hope it was a good lump, for our countrymen leave hundreds of thousands here every season."

"It was four thousand nine hundred pounds, sir."

"Pheugh! Well, I wish it had been double. You are not so close as our friend here, madam."

"No, sir; and shall I tell you why?"

"If you like, madam," said Smith, with assumed indifference.

"Mr. Ashmead is a model agent; he never allows himself to see anybody's interest but mine. Now, the truth is, another person has an interest in my famous winnings. A gentleman handed twenty-five pounds to Mr. Ashmead to play with. He did not do so; but I came in, and joined twenty-five of my own to that twenty-five pounds, and won an enormous sum. Of course, if the gentleman chooses to be chivalrous, and abandon his claim, he can; but that is not the way of the world, you know. I feel sure he will come to me for his share some day; and the sooner the better, for money burns the pocket."

Sharpus, *alias* Smith, said this was really a curious story. "Now, suppose," said he, "some fine day a letter was to come asking you to remit that gentleman his half, what should you do?"

"I should decline: it might be an *escroc*. No; Mr. Ashmead here knows the gentleman. Do you not?"

"I'll swear to him anywhere."

"Then, to receive his money, he must face the eye of Ashmead. Ha, ha!"

The detective turned the conversation, and never came back to the subject; but shortly he pleaded an engagement, and took his leave.

Ashmead lingered behind, but Ina hurried him off, with an emphatic command not to leave this man out of his sight a moment.

He violated this order; for in five minutes he ran back to tell her, in an agitated whisper, that Smith was, at that moment, writing a letter in the *salle à manger*.

"Oh, pray don't come here!" cried Ina, in despair. "Do not lose sight of him for a moment."

"Give me that letter to post then," said Ashmead, and snatched one up Ina had directed over-night.

He went to the hotel door and lighted a cigar; out came Smith with a letter in his very hand. Ashmead peered with all his eyes; but Smith held the letter vertically in his hand and the address inwards. The letter was sealed.

Ashmead watched him, and saw he was going to the general post. He knew a shorter cut, ran and took it, and lay in wait. As Smith approached the box, letter in hand, he bustled up in a furious hurry, and posted his own letter so as to stop Smith's hand at the very aperture before he could insert his letter. He saw, apologized, and drew back. Smith laughed, and said, "All right, old man. That is to your sweetheart, or you wouldn't be in such a hurry."

"No; it was to my grandmother," said Ashmead.

"Go on," said Smith, and poked the ribs of Joseph. They went home jocular; but the detective was no sooner out of the way, than Ashmead stole up to Ina Klosking, and put his finger to his lips; for Karl was clearing away, and in no hurry.

They sat on tenter-hooks, and thought he never would

go. He did go at last, and then the Klosking and Ashmead came together like two magnets.

"Well?"

"All right! Letter to post. Saw address quite plain. — Edward Severne, Esq."

"Yes."

"Vizard Court."

"Ah!"

"Taddington — Barfordshire — England."

Ina, who was standing all on fire, now sat down and interlaced her hands. "Vizard!" said she, gloomily.

"Yes; Vizard Court," said Ashmead, triumphantly; that means he is a large landed proprietor, and you will easily find him if he is there in a month."

"He will be there," said Ina. "She is very beautiful. She is dark, too, and he loves change. Oh, if to all I have suffered, he adds *that*" —

"Then you will forgive him *that*," said Ashmead, shaking his head.

"Never. Look at me, Joseph Ashmead."

He looked at her with some awe, for she seemed transformed, and her Danish eye gleamed strangely.

"You, who have seen my torments and my fidelity, mark what I say: If he is false to me with another woman, I shall kill him — or else I shall hate him."

She took her desk and wrote, at Ashmead's dictation:

"Vizard Court,
Taddington,
Barfordshire."

## CHAPTER XXI.

The next morning, Vizard carried Lord Uxmoor away to a magistrate's meeting, and left the road clear to Severne: but Zoe gave him no opportunity until just before luncheon, and then she put on her bonnet and came down-stairs; but Fanny was with her.

Severne, who was seated patiently in his bedroom with the door ajar, came out to join them, feeling sure Fanny would openly side with him, or slip away and give him his opportunity.

But, as the young ladies stood on the broad flight of steps at the hall door, an antique figure drew nigh — an old lady, the shape of an egg, so short and stout was she. On her head she wore a black silk bonnet constructed many years ago, with a droll design — viz., to keep off sun, rain, and wind; it was like an iron coal-scuttle, slightly shortened; yet have I seen some very pretty faces very prettily framed in such a bonnet. She had an old black silk gown that only reached to her ankle, and over it a scarlet cloak of superfine cloth, fine as any colonel or queen's outrider ever wore, and looking splendid, though she had used it forty years at odd times. This dame had escaped the village ill, rheumatics, and could toddle along without a staff, at a great and, indeed, a fearful pace; for owing to her build, she yawed so from side to side at every step, that, to them who knew her not, a capsize appeared inevitable.

"Mrs. Judge, I declare," cried Zoe.

"Ay, miss, Hannah Judge it is. Your servant, ma'am;" and she dropped two courtesies, one for each lady.

Mrs. Judge was Harrington's old nurse. Zoe often paid a visit to her cottage, but she never came to Vizard Court except on Harrington's birthday, when the servants entertained all the old pensioners and retainers at supper. Her sudden appearance, therefore, and in gala costume, astonished Zoe. Probably Zoe's face betrayed this, for the old lady began, "You wonder to see me here, now doan't ye?"

"Well, Mrs. Judge," said Zoe, diplomatically, "nobody has a better right to come."

"You be very good, miss. I don't doubt my welcome nohow."

"But," said Zoe, playfully, "you seldom do us the honor; so I *am* a little surprised. What can I do for you?"

"You does enough for me, miss, you and young Squire. I bain't come to ask no favors. I ain't one o' that sort. I'll tell ye why I be come. 'Tis to warn you all up here."

"This is alarming," said Zoe to Fanny.

"That is as may be," said Mrs. Judge: "forewarned, forearmed, the by-word sayeth. There is a young 'oman a-prowling about this here parish, as don't belong to *hus*."

"La!" said Fanny; "mustn't we visit your parish, if we were not born there?"

"Don't you take me up before I be down, miss," said the old nurse, a little severely. "'Tain't for the likes of you I speak, which you are a lady, and visits the Court by permission of Squire; but what I objects to is — hinterlopers." She paused, to see the effect of so big a word, and then resumed, graciously, "You see most of our hills comes from that there Hillstoke. If there's a poacher, or a thief, he is Hillstoke. They harbors the gypsies as ravages the whole country, mostly; and now they have let loose this here young 'oman on to us. She is a Poll Pry: goes about the town a-sarching:

pries into their housen, and their vittels, and their very beds. Old Marks have got a muckheap at his door; for his garden, ye know. Well, miss, she sticks her parasole into this here, and turns it about as if she was a-going to spread it: says she, 'I must know the decom-po-sition of this 'ere as you keeps under the noses of your young folk.' Well, I seed her a-going her rounds, and the folk had told me her ways; so I did set me down to my knitting and wait for her; and, when she came to me, I offered her a seat; so she sat herself down, and says she, 'This is the one clean house in the village,' says she: 'you might eat your dinner off the floor, let alone the chairs and tables.' 'You are very good, miss,' says I. Says she, 'I wonder whether upstairs is as nice as this?' 'Well,' says I, 'them as keeps it down-stairs keeps it hup; I don't drop cleanliness on the stairs, you may be sure.' 'I suppose not,' says she, 'but I should like to see.' That was what I was a-waiting for, you know, so I said to her, 'Curiosity do breed curiosity,' says I. 'Afore you sarches this here house from top to bottom, I should like to see the warrant.' 'What warrant?' says she. 'I've no warrant. Don't take me for an enemy,' says she. 'I'm your best friend,' says she. 'I'm the new doctor.' I told her I had heard a whisper of that too: but we had got a parish doctor already, and one was enough. 'Not when he never comes anigh you,' says she, 'and lets you go half-way to meet your diseases.' 'I don't know for that,' says I, and indeed I haan't a notion what she meant, for my part; but, says I, 'I don't want no women-folk to come here a-doctoring o' me, that's sartin.' So she said, 'But suppose you were very ill, and the he-doctor three miles off, and fifty others to visit afore you?' 'That is no odds,' says I; 'I would not be doctored by a woman.' Then she says to me, says she,

'Now you look me in the face.' 'I can do that," says I, 'you, or anybody else. I'm an honest woman, *I* am;' so I up and looked her in the face as bold as brass. 'Then,' says she, 'am I to understand that, if you was to be ill to-morrow, you would rather die than be doctored by a woman?' She thought to daant me, you see, so I says, 'Well, I don't know as I oodn't.' You do laugh, miss. Well, that is what she did. 'All right,' says she. 'Make haste and die, my good soul,' says she, 'for, while you live, you'll be a hobelisk to reform.' So she went off; but I made to the door, and called after her I should die when God pleased, and I had seen a good many young folk laid out, that looked as like to make old bones as ever she does — chalk-faced — skinny — to-a-d! And I called after her she was no lady. No more she ain't, to come into my own house and call a decent woman 'a hobelisk'! Oh! oh! Which I never *was*, not even in my giddy days, but did work hard in my youth, and arn respect for my old age."

"Yes, nurse, yes; who doubts it?"

"And nursed young Squire, and, Lord bless your heart! a was a poor puny child when I took him to my breast, and in six months the finest chubbiest boy in all the parish; and his dry nurse for years arter, and always at his heels a-keeping him out of the stable and the ponds and consorting with the village boys; and a proper resolute child he was, and hard to manage: and my own man that is gone, and my son 'that's not so clever as some,'[1] I always done justice by them both; and after all to be called a hobelisk, oh! oh! oh!"

Then behold the gentle Zoe with her arm round nurse's neck, and her handkerchief to nurse's eyes, murmuring, "There — there — don't cry, nurse — everybody esteems

[1] Paraphrase for the noun substantive "idiot." It is also a specimen of the Greek figure "Litotes."

you; and that lady did not mean to affront you; she did not say 'obelisk,' she said 'obstacle;' that only means that you stand in the way of her improvements; there was not much harm in that, you know. And, nurse, please give that lady her way, to oblige me; for it is by my brother's invitation she is here."

"Ye doan't say so. What! does he hold with female she-doctoresses?"

"He wishes to *try* one. She has his authority."

"Ye doan't say so."

"Indeed I do."

"Con—sarn the wench; why couldn't she say so, 'stead o' hargefying?"

"She is a stranger, and means well; so she did not think it necessary. You must take my word for it."

"La, miss, I'll take your'n before hers, you *may* be sure," said Mrs. Judge, with a decided remnant of hostility.

And now a proverbial incident happened. Miss Rhoda Gale came in sight, and walked rapidly into the group.

After greeting the ladies and ignoring Severne, who took off his hat to her, with deep respect, in the background, she turned to Mrs. Judge. "Well, old lady," said she, cheerfully, "and how do you do?"

Mrs. Judge replied in fawning accents, "Thank you, miss, I be well enough to get about. I was a-telling 'em about you — and, to be sure, it is uncommon good of a lady like you to trouble so much about poor folk."

"Don't mention it: it is my duty, and my inclination. You see, my good woman, it is not so easy to cure diseases as people think; therefore it is a part of medicine to prevent them: and to prevent them you must remove the predisposing causes, and to find out all those causes you must have eyes, and use them."

"You are right, miss," said La Judge, obsequiously.

"Prevention is better nor cure, and they say, 'a stitch in time saves nine.'"

"That is capital good sense, Mrs. Judge; and pray tell the villagers that, and make them as full of the 'wisdom of nations' as you seem to be, and their houses as clean — if you can."

"I'll do my best, miss," said Mrs. Judge, obsequiously; "it is the least we can all do for a young lady like you, that leaves the pomps and vanities, and gives her mind to bettering the condishing of poor folk."

Having once taken this cue and entered upon a vein of flattery, she would have been extremely voluble — for villages can vie with cities in adulation as well as in detraction — but she was interrupted by a footman announcing luncheon.

Zoe handed Mrs. Judge over to the man with a request that he would be kind to her, and have her to dine with the servants.

Yellowplush saw the gentlefolks away, and then, parting his legs, and putting his thumbs into his waistcoat-pockets, delivered himself thus: "Well, old girl, am I to give you my harm round to the kitchen; or do you know the way by yourself?"

"Young chap," said Mrs. Judge, and turned a glittering eye, "I did know the way afore you was born; and I should know it all one if so be you was to be hung, or sent to Botany Bay — to larn manners."

Having delivered this shot, she rolled away in the direction of Roast Beef.

The little party had hardly settled at the table, when they were joined by Vizard and Uxmoor; both gentlemen welcomed Miss Gale more heartily than the ladies had done, and before luncheon ended, Vizard asked her if her report was ready. She said it was.

"Have you got it with you?"

"Yes."

"Then please hand it to me."

"Oh, it is in my head! I don't write much down; that weakens the memory. If you would give me half an hour after luncheon" — she hesitated a little.

Zoe jealoused a *tête-à-tête*, and parried it skilfully. "Oh," said she, "but we are all much interested: are not you, Lord Uxmoor?"

"Indeed I am," said Uxmoor.

"So am I," said Fanny, who didn't care a button.

"Yes, but," said Rhoda, "truths are not always agreeable, and there are some that I don't like" — she hesitated again, and this time actually blushed a little.

The acute Mr. Severne, who had been watching her slyly, came to her assistance. "Look here, old fellow," said he to Vizard; "don't you see that Miss Gale has discovered some spots in your Paradise? but out of delicacy, does not want to publish them, but to confide them to your own ear. Then you can mend them or not."

Miss Gale turned her eyes full on Severne. "You are very keen at reading people, sir," said she, dryly.

"Of course he is," said Vizard. "He has given great attention to your sex. Well, if that is all, Miss Gale, pray speak out and gratify their curiosity. You and I shall never quarrel over the truth."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Miss Gale. "However, I suppose I must risk it. I never do get my own way; that's a fact."

After this little ebullition of spleen, she opened her budget. "First of all, I find that these villages all belong to one person; so does the soil: nobody can build cottages on a better model, nor make any other improvement; you are an absolute monarch. This is a piece of Russia, not England. They are all serfs, and you are the Tsar."

"It is true," said Vizard, "and it sounds horrid; but it works benignly. Every snob who can grind the poor does grind them; but a gentleman never, and he hinders others. Now, for instance, an English farmer is generally a tyrant; but my power limits his tyranny. He may discharge his laborer; but he can't drive him out of the village, nor rob him of parish relief, for poor Hodge is *my* tenant, not a snob's. Nobody can build a beer-shop in Islip. That is true. But if they could, they would sell bad beer, give credit in the ardor of competition, poison the villagers, and demoralize them. Believe me, republican institutions are beautiful on paper; but they would not work well in Barfordshire villages. However, you profess to go by experience in everything. There are open villages within five miles. I'll give you a list. Visit them. You will find that liberty can be the father of tyranny. Petty tradesmen have come in and built cottages, and ground the poor down with rents unknown in Islip; farmers have built cottages, and turned their laborers into slaves. Drunkenness, dissipation, poverty, disaffection, and misery — that is what you will find in the open villages. Now, in Islip you have an omnipotent squire, and that is an abomination in theory — a mediæval monster, a blot on modern civilization; but practically the poor monster is a softener of poverty — an incarnate buffer between the poor and tyranny, the poor and misery."

"I'll inspect the open villages, and suspend my opinion till then," said Miss Gale, heartily; "but, in the meantime, you must admit that where there is great power there is great responsibility."

"Oh, of course."

"Well, then, your little outlying province of Hillstoke is full of rheumatic adults and putty-faced children. The two phenomena arise from one cause — the water.

No lime in it; and too many reptiles. It was the children gave me the clew. I suspected the cherry-stones at first: but when I came to look into it, I found that they eat just as many cherry-stones in the valley, and are as rosy as apples; but then there is well-water in the valleys. So I put this and that together, and I examined the water they drink at Hillstoke. Sir, it is full of animalcules. Some of these cannot withstand the heat of the human stomach; but others can, for I tried them in mud artifically heated. (A giggle from Fanny Dover.) Thanks to your microscope, I have made sketches of several infusoria who live in those boys' stomachs, and irritate their membranes, and share their scanty nourishment, besides other injuries." Thereupon she produced some drawings. They were handed round, and struck terror in gentle bosoms. "Oh, gracious!" cried Fanny, "one ought to drink nothing but champagne." Uxmoor looked grave. Vizard affected to doubt their authenticity. He said, "You may not know it, but I am a zoölogist, and these are antediluvian eccentricities, that have long ceased to embellish the world we live in. Fie, Miss Gale! Down with anachronisms."

Miss Gale smiled, and admitted that one or two of the prodigies resembled antediluvian monsters: but said oracularly that Nature was fond of producing the same thing on a large scale and a small scale; and it was quite possible the small type of antediluvian monster might have survived the large.

"That is most ingenious," said Vizard; "but it does not account for this fellow. He is not an antediluvian. He is a barefaced modern: for he is A STEAM-ENGINE."

This caused a laugh, for the creature had a perpendicular neck, like a funnel, that rose out of a body like a horizontal cylinder.

"At any rate," said Miss Gale, "the little monster

was in the world before us; so he is not an imitation of man's work."

"Well," said Vizard, "after all, we have had enough of the monsters of the deep. Now we can vary the monotony, and say the monsters of the shallow. But I don't see how they can cause rheumatism."

"I never said they did," retorted Miss Gale, sharply: "but the water which contains them is soft water. There is no lime in it, and that is bad for the bones in every way. Only the children drink it as it is: the wives boil it, and so drink soft water and dead reptiles in their tea. The men instinctively avoid it, and drink nothing but beer. Thus for want of a pure diluent with lime in solution, an acid is created in the blood which produces gout in the rich, and rheumatism in the poor, thanks to their meagre food, and exposure to the weather."

"Poor things!" said womanly Zoe. "What is to be done?"

"La," said Fanny, "throw lime into the ponds: that will kill the monsters, and cure the old people's bones into the bargain."

This compendious scheme struck the imagination, but did not satisfy the judgment, of the assembly.

"Fanny!" said Zoe, reproachfully.

"That *would* be killing two birds with one stone," suggested Uxmoor, satirically.

"The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel," explained Vizard, composedly.

Zoe reiterated her question, what was to be done?

Miss Gale turned to her with a smile. "*We* have nothing to do but to point out these abominations. The person to act is the Russian autocrat, the paternal dictator, the monarch of all he surveys, and advocate of monarchical institutions. He is the buffer between the poor and all their ills, especially poison — he must dig a well."

Every eye being turned on Vizard to see how he took this, he said, a little satirically: "What! Does science bid me bore for water at the top of a hill?"

"She does *so*," said the virago. "Now look here, good people."

And although they were not all good people, yet they all did look there; she shone so with intelligence, being now quite on her mettle.

"Half-civilized man makes blunders that both the savage and the civilized avoid. The savage builds his hut by a running stream. The civilized man draws good water to his door, though he must lay down pipes from a highland lake to a lowland city. It is only half-civilized man that builds a village on a hill, and drinks worms, and snakes, and efts, and antediluvian monsters in limeless water. Then I say, if great but half-civilized monarchs would consult Science *before* they built their serf-huts, Science would say, 'Don't you go and put down human habitations far from pure water — the universal diluent — the only cheap diluent — and the only liquid which does not require digestion, and therefore must always assist and never chemically resist the digestion of solids.' But when the mischief is done, and the cottages are built on a hill three miles from water, then all that science can do is to show the remedy, and the remedy is — boring."

"Then the remedy is like the discussion," said Fanny Dover, very pertly.

Zoe was amused but shocked. Miss Gale turned her head on the offender, as sharp as a bird. "Of course it is to *children*," said she; "and that is why I wished to confine it to mature minds. It is to you I speak, sir. Are your subjects to drink poison, or will you bore me a well? — Oh, please!"

"Do your hear that?" said Vizard, piteously, to

Uxmoor. "Threatened and cajoled in one breath. Who can resist this fatal sex? — Miss Gale, I will bore a well on Hillstoke common. Any idea how deep we must go — to the antipodes, or only to the centre?"

"Three hundred and thirty feet, or thereabouts."

"No more? Any idea what it will cost?"

"Of course I have. The well, the double windlass, the iron chain, the two buckets, a cupola over the well, and twenty-three keys, one for every head of a house in the hamlet, will cost you about three hundred and fifteen pounds."

"Why, this is Detail made woman. How do you know all this?"

"From Tom Wilder."

"Who is he?"

"What! don't you know? he is the eldest son of the Islip blacksmith, and a man that will make his mark. He casts every Thursday night. He is the only village blacksmith in all the county who *casts*. You know that, I suppose."

"No; I had not the honor."

"Well, he is then: and I thought you would consent, because you are so good; and so I thought there could be no harm in sounding Tom Wilder. He offers to take the whole contract, if Squire's agreeable; bore the well; brick it fifty yards down: he says that ought to be done, if she is to have justice. 'She' is the well: and he will also construct the gear. He says there must be two iron chains and two buckets going together; so then the empty bucket descending will help the man or woman at the windlass to draw the full bucket up. Three hundred and fifteen pounds. — One week's income, your majesty."

"She has inspected our rent-roll, now," said Vizard, pathetically; "and knows nothing about the matter."

"Except that it is a mere flea-bite to you to bore through a hill for water. For all that, I hope you will leave me to battle it with Tom Wilder; then you won't be cheated for once. *You always are,* and it is abominable. It would have been five hundred if you had opened the business."

"I am sure that is true," said Zoe. She added, this would please Mrs. Judge: she was full of the superiority of Islip to Hillstoke.

"Stop a bit," said Vizard. "Miss Gale has not reported on Islip yet."

"No, dear; but she has looked into everything, for Mrs. Judge told me. You have been into the cottages?"

"Yes."

"Into Mark's?"

"Yes, I have been into Mark's."

She did not seem inclined to be very communicative; so Fanny, out of mischief, said pertly, "And what did you see there — with your Argus eye?"

"I saw — three generations."

"Ha, ha! La! did you now? And what were they all doing?"

"They were all living together, night and day, in one room."

This conveyed no very distinct idea to the ladies; but Vizard, for the first time, turned red at this revelation before Uxmoor, improver of cottage life. "Confound the brutes!" said he. "Why, I built them a new room — a larger one; didn't you see it?"

"Yes. They stack their potatoes in it."

"Just like my people," said Uxmoor. "That is the worst of it; they resist their own improvement."

"Yes, but," said the doctress, "with monarchical power we can trample on them for their good. Outside Mark's door at the back there is a muck-heap, as he

calls it; all the refuse of the house is thrown there: it is a horrible melange of organic matter and decaying vegetables, a hotbed of malaria. Suffocated and poisoned with the breath of a dozen persons, they open the window for fresh air, and in rushes fever from the stronghold its victims have built. Two children were buried from that house last year. They were both killed by the domestic arrangements as certainly as if they had been shot with a double-barrelled pistol. The outside roses you admire so are as delusive as flattery; their sweetness covers a foul, unwholesome den."

"Mark's cottage! The show place of the village!" Zoe Vizard flushed with indignation at the bold hand of truth so rudely applied to a pleasant and cherished illusion.

Vizard, more candid and open to new truths, shrugged his shoulders, and said, "What can I do more than I have done?"

"Oh, it is not your fault," said the doctress, graciously; "it is theirs. Only, as you are their superior in intelligence and power, you might do something to put down indecency, immorality, and disease."

"May I ask what?"

"Well, you might build a granary for the poor people's potatoes. No room can keep them dry; but you build your granary upon four pillars: then that is like a room over a cellar."

"Well, I'll build it so — if I build it at all," said Vizard, dryly. What next?"

"Then you could make them stack their potatoes in the granary, and use the spare room, and so divide their families, and give morality a chance. The muck-heap you should disperse at once with the strong hand of power."

At this last proposal, Squire Vizard — the truth must

be told — delivered a long ploughman's whistle at the head of his own table.

"Pheugh!" said he; "for a lady that is more than half republican, you seem to be taking very kindly to monarchical tyranny."

"Well, now, I'll tell you the truth," said she. "You have converted me. Ever since you promised me the well, I have discovered that the best form of government is a good-hearted tyrant."

"With a female viceroy over him, eh?"

"Only in these little domestic matters," said Rhoda, deprecatingly: "women are good advisers in such things. The male physician relies on drugs. Medical women are wanted to moderate that delusion; to prevent disease by domestic vigilance, and cure it by well-selected esculents and pure air. These will cure fifty for one that medicine can: besides, drugs kill ever so many; these never killed a creature. You will give me the granary, won't you? Oh, and there's a black pond in the centre of the village. Your tenant Pickett, who is a fool — begging his pardon — lets all his liquid manure run out of his yard into the village till it accumulates in a pond right opposite the five cottages they call New Town; and its exhalations taint the air. There are as many fevers in Islip as in the back-slums of a town. You might fill the pond up with chalk, and compel Pickett to sink a tank in his yard, and cover it; then an agricultural treasure would be preserved for its proper use, instead of being perverted into a source of infection."

Vizard listened civilly, and, as she stopped, requested her to go on.

"I think we have had enough," said Zoe bitterly.

Rhoda, who was in love with Zoe, hung her head, and said, "Yes; I have been very bold."

"Fiddlestick!" said Vizard. "Never mind those

girls; *you* speak out like a man; a stranger's eye always discovers things that escape the natives. Proceed."

"No; I won't proceed till I have explained to Miss Vizard."

"You may spare yourself the trouble. Miss Vizard thought Islip was a paradise. You have dispelled the illusion, and she will never forgive you. Miss Dover will; because she is like Gallio — she careth for none of these things."

"Not a pin," said Fanny, with admirable frankness.

"Well, but," said Rhoda, naïvely, "I can't bear Miss Vizard to be angry with me; I admire her so. Please let me explain. Islip is no paradise — quite the reverse; but the faults of Islip are not *your* faults. The children are ignorant; but you pay for school. The people are poor from insufficient wages; but you are not paymaster. *Your* gardeners, *your* hinds, and all your out-door people have enough. You give them houses. You let cottages and gardens to the rest at half their value; and very often they don't pay that, but make excuses; and you accept them, though they are all stories; for they can pay everybody but you, and their one good bargain is with you. Miss Vizard has carried a basket all her life with things from your table for the poor."

Miss Vizard blushed crimson at this sudden revelation.

"If a man or a woman has served your house long, there's a pension for life. You are easy, kind, and charitable. It is the faults of others I ask you to cure, because you have such power. Now, for instance, if the boys at Hillstoke are putty-faced, the boys at Islip have no calves to their legs. That is a sure sign of a deteriorating species. The lower type of savage has next to no calf. The calf is a sign of civilization and due nourishment. This single phenomenon was my clew, and led me to others; and I have examined the mothers and the

people of all ages, and I tell you it is a village of starvelings. Here a child begins life a starveling, and ends as he began. The nursing-mother has not food enough for one, far less for two. The man's wages are insufficient, and the diet is not only insufficient, but injudicious. The race has declined. There are only five big, strong men in Islip — Josh Grace, Will Hudson, David Wilder, Absalom Green, and Jack Greenaway; and they are all over fifty — men of another generation. I have questioned these men how they were bred, and they all say milk was common when they were boys. Many poor people kept a cow; Squire doled it; the farmers gave it, or sold it cheap; but nowadays it is scarcely to be had. Now that is not your fault, but you are the man who can mend it. New milk is meat and drink, especially to young and growing people. You have a large meadow at the back of the village. If you could be persuaded to start four or five cows, and let somebody sell their new milk to the poor at cost price — say five farthings the quart. You must not give it, or they will water their muck-heaps with it. With those cows alone you will get rid, in the next generation, of the half-grown, slouching men, the hollow-eyed, narrow-chested, round-backed women, and the calfless boys one sees all over Islip, and restore the stalwart race that filled the little village under your sires, and have left proofs of their wholesome food on the tombstones: for I have read every inscription, and far more people reached eighty-five between 1750 and 1800 than between 1820 and 1870. Ah! how I envy you to be able to do such great things so easily! Water to poisoned Hillstoke with one hand; milk to starved Islip with the other. This is to be indeed a king!"

The enthusiast rose from the table in her excitement, and her face was transfigured; she looked beautiful for the moment.

"I'll do it," shouted Vizard; "and you are a trump."

Miss Gale sat down, and the color left her cheek entirely.

Fanny Dover, who had a very quick eye for passing events, cried out, "Oh dear! she is going to faint *now*." The tone implied, what a diversified plague she is!

Thereupon Severne rushed to her, and was going to sprinkle her face; but she faltered, "No, no! a glass of wine." He gave her one with all the hurry and *empressement* in the world. She fixed him with a strange look as she took it from him: she sipped it; one tear ran into it. She said she had excited herself. But she was all right now. Elastic Rhoda!

"I am very glad of it," said Vizard. "You are quite strong enough, without fainting. For heaven's sake, don't add woman's weakness to your artillery, or you will be irresistible; and I shall have to divide Vizard Court amongst the villagers. At present I get off cheap, and science on the rampage: let me see, only a granary — a well — and six cows."

"They'll give us as much milk as twelve cows without the well," said Fanny; it was her day for wit.

This time she was rewarded with a general laugh.

It subsided, as such things will, and then Vizard said, solemnly, "New ideas are suggested to me by this charming interview; and permit me to give them a form which will doubtless be new to these accomplished ladies.

'Gin there's a hole in a' your coats,
I rede ye tent it;
A chiel's amang ye takin' notes,
And faith he'll prent it.'

Zoe looked puzzled, and Fanny inquired what language that was.

"Very good language."

"Then perhaps you will translate it into language one can understand?"

"The English of the day, eh?"

"Yes."

"You think that would improve it, do you? Well then —

If there is a defect in any one of your habiliments,
Let me earnestly impress on you the expediency of repairing it;
An individual is amongst you with singular powers of observation,
Which will infallibly result in printing and publication.

Zoe, you are an affectionate sister; take this too observant lady into the garden, poison her with raw fruit, and bury her under a pear-tree."

Zoe said she would carry out part of the programme, if Miss Gale would come.

Then the ladies rose and rustled away, and the rivals would have followed, but Vizard detained them on the pretence of consulting them about the well; but, when the ladies had gone, he owned he had done it out of his hatred to the sex. He said he was sure both girls disliked his virago in their hearts, so he had compelled them to spend an hour together, without any man to soften their asperity.

This malicious experiment was tolerably successful. The three ladies strolled together, dismal as souls in purgatory. One or two little attempts at conversation were made, but died out for want of sympathy. Then Fanny tried personalities, the natural topic of the sex in general.

"Miss Gale, which do you admire most, Lord Uxmoor, or Mr. Severne?"

"For their looks?"

"Oh, of course!"

"Mr. Severne."

"You don't admire beards, then?"

"That depends. Where the mouth is well shaped and expressive, the beard spoils it. Where it is commonplace, the beard hides its defect, and gives a manly character. As a general rule, I think the male bird looks well with his crest and feathers."

"And so do I," said Fanny warmly; "and yet I should not like Mr. Severne to have a beard. Don't you think he is very handsome?"

"He is something more," said Rhoda: "he is beautiful. If he was dressed as a woman, the gentlemen would all run after him. I think his is the most perfect oval face I ever saw."

"But you must not fall in love with him," said Fanny.

"I do not mean to," said Rhoda. "Falling in love is not my business; and, if it was, I should not select Mr. Severne."

"Why not, pray?" inquired Zoe, haughtily. Her manner was so menacing, that Rhoda did not like to say too much just then. She felt her way.

"I am a physiogomist," said she, "and I don't think he can be very truthful. He is old of his age, and there are premature marks under his eyes that reveal craft, and, perhaps, dissipation. These are hardly visible in the room, but they are in the open air, when you get the full light of day. To be sure, just now his face is marked with care and anxiety; that young man has a good deal on his mind."

Here the observer discovered that even this was a great deal too much. Zoe was displeased, and felt affronted by her remarks, though she did not condescend to notice them, so Rhoda broke off, and said, "It is not

fair of you, Miss Dover, to set me giving my opinion of people you must know better than I do. Oh, what a garden!" And she was off directly on a tour of inspection. "Come along," said she, "and I will tell you their names and properties."

They could hardly keep up with her, she was so eager. The fruits did not interest her, but only the simples. She was downright learned in these, and found a surprising number. But the fact is, Mr. Lucas had a respect for his predecessors. What they had planted he seldom uprooted — at least, he always left a specimen. Miss Gale approved his system highly, until she came to a row of leaves planted by the side of the horseradish.

"This is too bad, even for Islip," said Miss Gale. "Here is one of our deadliest poisons, planted by the very side of an esculent root, which it resembles. You don't happen to have hired the devil for gardener at any time, do you? Just fancy! any cook might come out here for horseradish, and gather this plant, and lay you all dead at your own table. It is the *Aconitum* of medicine, the monk's-hood, or wolf's-bane, of our ancestors. Call the gardener, please, and have every bit of it pulled up by the roots. None of your lives are safe while poisons and esculents are planted together like this."

And she would not budge till Zoe directed a gardener to dig up all the aconite. A couple of them went to work, and soon uprooted it. The gardeners then asked if they should burn it.

"Not for all the world," said Miss Gale. "Make a bundle of it for me to take home. It is only poison in the hands of ignoramuses. It is most sovereign medicine. I shall make tinctures, and check many a sharp ill with it. Given in time, it cuts down fever wonderfully; and, when you check the fever, you check the disease."

Soon after this, Miss Gale said she had not come to stop; she was on her way to Taddington to buy lint and German styptics, and many things useful in domestic surgery: "for," said she, "the people at Hillstoke are relenting; at least, they run to me with their cut fingers and black eyes, though they won't trust me with their sacred rheumatics. I must also supply myself with vermifuges till the well is dug, and so mitigate puerile puttiness and internal torments."

The other ladies were not sorry to get rid of an irrelevant zealot, who talked neither love nor dress, nor anything that reaches the soul.

So Zoe said, "What! going already?" and, having paid that tax to politeness, returned to the house with alacrity.

But the doctress would not go without her wolf's-bane, aconite yclept.

The irrelevant zealot being gone, the true business of the mind was resumed; and that is love-making, or novelists give us false pictures of life, and that is impossible.

As the doctress drove from the front door, Lord Uxmoor emerged from the library, a coincidence that made both girls smile; he hoped Miss Vizard was not too tired to take another turn.

"Oh, no!" said Zoe; "are you, Fanny?"

At the first step they took, Severne came round an angle of the building, and joined them. He had watched from the balcony of his bedroom.

Both men looked black at each other, and made up to Zoe. She felt uncomfortable, and hardly knew what to do. However, she would not seem to observe, and was polite, but a little stiff, to both.

However, at last, Severne, having asserted his rights, as he thought, gave way, but not without a sufficient

motive, as may be gathered from his first word to Fanny.

"My dear friend — for heaven's sake, what is the matter? She is angry with me about something. What is it? has she told you?"

"Not a word. But I see she is in a fury with you; and, really, it is too ridiculous. You told a fib: that is the mighty matter, I do believe. No, it isn't, for you have told her a hundred, no doubt, and she liked you all the better; but this time you have been naughty enough to be found out, and she is romantic, and thinks her lover ought to be the soul of truth."

"Well, and so he ought," said Ned.

"He isn't, then;" and Fanny burst out laughing so loud that Zoe turned round, and enveloped them both in one haughty glance, as the exaggerating Gaul would say.

"La! there was a look for you!" said Fanny, pertly; "as if I cared for her black brows."

"I do, though: pray remember that."

"Then tell no more fibs. Such a fuss about nothing. What is a fib?" and she turned up her little nose very contemptuously at all such trivial souls as minded a little mendacity.

Indeed, she disclaimed the importance of veracity so imperiously that Severne was betrayed into saying, "Well, not much, between you and me: and I'll be bound I can explain it."

"Explain it to me, then."

"Well, but I don't know" —

"Which of your fibs it was."

Another silver burst of laughter. But Zoe only vouchsafed a slightly contemptuous movement of her shoulders.

"Well, no," said Severne, half laughing himself at the sprightly jade's smartness.

"Well, then, that friend of yours that called at luncheon."

Severne turned grave directly. "Yes," said he.

"You said he was your lawyer, and came about a lease."

"So he did."

"And his name was Jackson."

"So it was."

"This won't do. You mustn't fib to *me!* It was Poikilus, a Secret Inquiry; and they all know it: now tell me, without a fib — if you can — what ever did you want with Poikilus?"

Severne looked aghast. He faltered out, "Why, how could they know?"

"Why, he advertises — stupid — and Lord Uxmoor and Harrington had seen it. Gentlemen *read* advertisements. That is one of their peculiarities."

"Of course he advertises: that is not what I mean. I did not drop his card, did I? No, I am sure I pocketed it directly. What mischief-making villain told them it was Poikilus?"

Fanny colored a little, but said, hastily, "Ah, that I could not tell you."

"The footman, perhaps?"

"I should not wonder." [What is a fib?]

"Curse him!"

"Oh, don't swear at the servants; that is bad taste."

"Not when he has ruined me?"

"Ruined you? Nonsense! Make up some other fib, and excuse the first."

"I can't. I don't know what to do; and before my rival, too. This accounts for the air of triumph he has worn ever since, and her glances of scorn and pity. She is an angel, and I have lost her."

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Fanny Dover. "Be a man, and tell me the truth."

"Well, I will," said he; "for I am in despair. It is

all that cursed money at Homburg. I could not clear my estate without it. I dare not go for it. She forbade me; and, indeed, I can't bear to leave her for anything; so I employed Poikilus to try and learn whether that lady has the money still, and whether she means to rob me of it, or not."

Fanny Dover reflected a moment, then delivered herself thus: "You were wrong to tell a fib about it. What you must do now, brazen it out. Tell her you love her, but have got your pride, and will not come into her family a pauper. Defy her, to be sure: we like to be defied now and then, when we are fond of the fellow."

"I will do it," said he; "but she shuns me. I can't get a word with her."

Fanny said she would try and manage that for him; and as the rest of their talk might not interest the reader, and certainly would not edify him, I pass on to the fact that she did, that very afternoon, go into Zoe's room, and tell her Severne was very unhappy: he had told a fib; but it was not intended to deceive her, and he wished to explain the whole thing.

"Did he explain it to you?" asked Zoe, rather sharply.

"No; but he said enough to make me think you are using him very hardly. To be sure, you have another string to your bow."

"Oh, that is the interpretation you put."

"It is the true one. Do you think you can make *me* believe you would have shied him so long if Lord Uxmoor had not been in the house?"

Zoe bridled, but made no reply, and Fanny went to her own room, laughing.

Zoe was much disturbed. She secretly longed to hear Severne justify himself. She could not forgive a lie, nor esteem a liar. She was one of those who could

pardon certain things in a woman she would not forgive in a man. Under a calm exterior, she had suffered a noble distress; but her pride would not let her show it. Yet now that he had appealed to her for a hearing, and Fanny knew he had appealed, she began to falter.

Still Fanny was not altogether wrong: the presence of a man incapable of a falsehood, and that man devoted to her, was a little damaging to Severne, though not so much as Miss Artful thought.

However, this very afternoon, Lord Uxmoor had told her he must leave Vizard Court to-morrow morning.

So Zoe said to herself, "I need not make opportunities; after to-morrow he will find plenty."

She had an instinctive fear he would tell more falsehoods, to cover those he had told; and then she should despise him, and they would both be miserable; for she felt, for a moment, a horrible dread that she might both love and despise the same person, if it was Edward Severne.

There were several people to dinner, and, as hostess, she managed not to think too much of either of her admirers.

However, a stolen glance showed her they were both out of spirits. She felt sorry. Her nature was very pitiful. She asked herself was it her fault; and did not quite acquit herself. Perhaps she ought to have been more open, and declared her sentiments. Yet would that have been modest in a lady who was not formally engaged? She was puzzled. She had no experience to guide her: only her high breeding and her virginal instincts.

She was glad when the night ended.

She caught herself wishing the next day was gone too.

When she retired Uxmoor was already gone, and Severne opened the door to her. He fixed his eyes on her so imploringly it made her heart melt; but she only blushed high, and went away sad and silent.

As her maid was undressing her she caught sight of a letter on her table. "What is that?" said she.

"It is a letter," said Rosa, very demurely.

Zoe divined that the girl had been asked to put it there.

Her bosom heaved, but she would not encourage such proceedings, nor let Rosa see how eager she was to hear those very excuses she had evaded.

But, for all that, Rosa knew she was going to read it, for she only had her gown taken off and a *peignoir* substituted, and her hair let down and brushed a little. Then she dismissed Rosa, locked the door, and pounced on the letter. It lay on her table with the seal uppermost. She turned it round: it was not from *him;* was from Lord Uxmoor.

She ran down and read it.

Dear Miss Vizard, — I have had no opportunities of telling you all I feel for you, without attracting an attention that might have been unpleasant to you; but I am sure you must have seen that I admired you at first sight. That was admiration of your beauty and grace, though even then you showed me a gentle heart and a sympathy that made me grateful. But now I have had the privilege of being under the same roof with you, it is admiration no longer — it is deep and ardent love, and I see that my happiness depends on you. Will you confide *your* happiness to me? I don't know that I could make you as proud and happy as I should be myself; but I should try very hard, out of gratitude as well as love. We have also certain sentiments in common. That would be one bond more.

But indeed I feel I cannot make my love a good bargain to you, for you are peerless, and deserve a much better lot in

every way than I can offer. I can only kneel to you and say, "Zoe Vizard, if your heart is your own to give, pray be my lover, my queen, my wife."

Your faithful servant and devoted admirer,

UXMOOR.

"Poor fellow!" said Zoe, and her eyes filled. She sat quite quiet, with the letter open in her hand.

She looked at it, and murmured, "A pearl is offered me here: wealth, title, all that some women sigh for; and — what I value above all — a noble nature, a true heart, and a soul above all meanness. No; Uxmoor will never tell a falsehood. He *could* not."

She sighed deeply, and closed her eyes. All was still. The light was faint; yet she closed her eyes, like a true woman, to see the future clearer.

Then, in the sober and deep calm, there seemed to be faint peeps of coming things: it appeared a troubled sea, and Uxmoor's strong hand stretched out to rescue her. If she married him she knew the worst, — an honest man she esteemed, and had almost an affection for — but no love.

As some have an impulse to fling themselves from a height, she had one to give herself to Uxmoor, quietly, irrevocably, by three written words despatched that night.

But it was only an impulse. If she had written it, she would have torn it up.

Presently a light thrill passed through her; she wore a sort of half furtive, guilty look, and opened the window.

Ay, there he stood in the moonlight, waiting to be heard.

She did not start, nor utter any exclamation. Somehow or other she almost *knew* he was there, before she opened the window.

"Well," said she, with a world of meaning.

"You grant me a hearing at last."

"I do. But it is no use. You cannot explain away a falsehood."

"Of course not. I am here to confess that I told a falsehood. But it was not you I wished to deceive. I was going to explain the whole thing to you and tell you all; but there is no getting a word with you since that lord came."

"He had nothing to do with it. I should have been just as much shocked."

"But it would only have been for five minutes. Zoe!"

"Well?"

"Just put yourself in my place. A detective, who ought to have written to me in reply to my note, surprises me with a call. I was ashamed that such a visitor should enter your brother's house to see me. There sat my rival — an aristocrat. I was surprised into disowning the unwelcome visitor, and calling him my solicitor."

Now, if Zoe had been an Old Bailey counsel she would have kept him to the point, reminded him that his visitor was unseen, and fixed a voluntary falsehood on him; but she was not an experienced cross-examiner, and perhaps she was at heart as indignant at the detective as at the falsehood: so she missed her advantage, and said, indignantly, "And what business had you with a detective? Your having one at all, and then calling him your solicitor, makes one think all manner of things."

"I should have told you all about it that afternoon; only our intercourse is broken off, to please a rival. Suppose I gave you a rival, and used you, for her sake, as you use me for his, what would you say? That would be a worse infidelity than sending for a detective, would it not?"

Zoe replied haughtily, "You have no right to say you have a rival — how dare you? Besides," said she, a little ruefully, "it is you who are on your defence, not me."

"True; I forgot that. Recrimination is not convenient, is it?"

"I can escape it by shutting the window," said Zoe, coldly.

"Oh, don't do that. Let me have the bliss of seeing you, and I will submit to a good deal of injustice without a murmur."

"The detective?" said Zoe, sternly.

"I sent for him, and gave him his instructions, and he has gone for me to Homburg."

"Ah! I thought so. What for?"

"About my money. To try and find out whether they mean to keep it."

"Would you really take it if they would give it you?"

"Of course I would."

"Yet you know my mind about it."

"I know you forbade me to go for it in person, and I obeyed you, did I not?"

"Yes, you did — at the time."

"I do now. You object to my going in person to Homburg. You know I was once acquainted with that lady, and you feel about her a little of what I feel about Lord Uxmoor; about a tenth part of what I feel, I suppose, and with not one-tenth so much reason. Well, I know what the pangs of jealousy are; I will never inflict them on you, as you have on me. But I *will* have my money, whether you like or not."

Zoe looked amazed at being defied. It was new to her. She drew up, but said nothing.

Severne went on: "And I will tell you why; because

without money I cannot have you. My circumstances have lately improved; with my money that lies in Homburg I can now clear my family estate of all incumbrance, and come to your brother for your hand. Oh, I shall be a very bad match even then, but I shall not be a pauper, nor a man in debt. I shall be one of your own class, as I was born — a small landed gentleman with an unencumbered estate."

"That is not the way to my affection. I do not care for money."

"But other people do. Dear Zoe, you have plenty of pride yourself; you must let me have a little. Deeply as I love you, I could not come to your brother and say, 'Give me your sister, and maintain us both.' No, Zoe, I cannot ask your hand till I have cleared my estate; and I cannot clear it without that money. For once I must resist you, and take my chance. There is wealth and a title offered you. I won't ask you to dismiss them and take a pauper. If you don't like me to try for my own money, give your hand to Lord Uxmoor; then I shall recall my detective, and let all go; for poverty or wealth will matter nothing to me; I shall have lost the angel I love; and she once loved me."

He faltered, and the sad cadence of his voice melted her. She began to cry. He turned his head away, and cried too.

There was a silence. Zoe broke it first.

"Edward," said she, softly.

"Zoe!"

"You need not defy me. I would not humiliate you for all the world. Will it comfort you to know that I have been very unhappy ever since you lowered yourself so? I will try and accept your explanation."

He clasped his hands with gratitude.

"Edward, will you grant me a favor?"

"Can you ask?"

"It is to have a little more confidence in one who — Now you must obey me implicitly, and perhaps we may both be happier to-morrow night than we are to-night. Directly after breakfast, take your hat, and walk to Hillstoke. You can call on Miss Gale, if you like; and say something civil."

"What! go and leave you alone with Lord Uxmoor?"

"Yes."

"Ah, Zoe! you know your power. Have a little mercy."

"Perhaps I may have a great deal, if you obey me."

"I *will* obey you."

"Then go to bed this minute."

She gave him a heavenly smile, and closed the window.

Next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, Ned Severne said, "Any messages for Hillstoke? I am going to walk up there this morning."

"Embrace my virago for me," said Vizard.

Severne begged to be excused.

He hurried off, and Lord Uxmoor felt a certain relief.

The master of arts asked himself what he could do to propitiate the female M.D. He went to the gardener and got him to cut a huge bouquet, choice and fragrant, and he carried it all the way to Hillstoke. Miss Gale was at home. As he was introduced rather suddenly, she started and changed color, and said, sharply, "What do you want?" Never asked him to sit down, rude thing.

He stood hanging his head like a culprit, and said, with well-feigned timidity, that he came by desire of Miss Vizard, to inquire how she was getting on, and to hope the people were beginning to appreciate her.

"Oh! that alters the case; any messenger from Miss

Vizard is welcome. Did she send me these flowers, too? They are beautiful."

"No; I gathered them myself. I have always understood ladies love flowers."

"It is only by report you know that, eh? Let me add something to your information; a good deal depends on the giver; and you may fling these out of the window." She tossed them to him.

The master of arts gave a humble, patient sigh, and threw the flowers out of the window, which was open. He then sank into a chair, and hid his face in his hands.

Miss Gale colored, and bit her lip. She did not think he would have done that, and it vexed her economical soul. She cast a piercing glance at him, then resumed her studies, and ignored his presence.

But his patience exhausted hers. He sat there twenty minutes, at least, in a state of collapse that bade fair to last forever.

So presently she looked up, and affected to start. "What! are you there still?" said she.

"Yes," said he; "you did not dismiss me — only my poor flowers."

"Well," said she, apologetically, "the truth is, I'm not strong enough to dismiss you by the same road."

"It is not necessary. You have only to say 'Go.'"

"Oh, that would be rude. Could not you go without being told right out?"

"No, I could not. Miss Gale, I can't account for it, but there is some strange attraction. You hate me, and I fear you, yet I could follow you about like a dog; let me sit here a little longer, and see you work."

Miss Gale leaned her head upon her hand, and contemplated him at great length. Finally she adopted a cat-like course. "No," said she at last; "I am going my rounds; you can come with me, if I am so attractive."

He said he should be proud, and she put on her hat in thirty seconds.

They walked together in silence. He felt as if he was promenading a tiger-cat, that might stop any moment to fall upon him.

She walked him into a cottage; there was a little dead wood burning on that portion of the brick floor called the hearth. A pale old man sat close to the fire, in a wooden arm-chair. She felt his pulse, and wrote him a prescription: —

*To Mr. Vizard's housekeeper, Vizard Court.*

Please give the bearer two pounds of good roast-beef, or mutton, not salted, and one pint port wine.

RHODA GALE, M.D.

"Here, Jenny," she said, to a sharp little girl, the man's grand-niece, "take this down to Vizard Court, and, if the housekeeper objects, go to the front door, and demand, in my name, to see the squire or Miss Vizard, and give *them* the paper. Don't you give it up without the meat. Take this basket on your arm."

Then she walked out of the cottage, and Severne followed her; he ventured to say that was a novel prescription.

She explained. "Physicians are obliged to send the rich to the chemist, or else the fools would think they were slighted. But we need not be so nice with the poor; we can prescribe to do them good. When you inflicted your company on me, I was sketching out a treatise, to be entitled 'Cure of Disorders by Esculents.' That old man is nearly *exsanguis*. There is not a drug in creation that could do him an atom of good. Nourishing food may. If not, why he is booked for the long journey! Well, he has had his innings. He is fourscore. Do you think *you* will ever see fourscore, you and your vices?"

"Oh, no. But I think *you* will, and I hope so; for you go about doing good."

"And some people one could name go about doing mischief."

Severne made no reply.

Soon after they discovered a little group, principally women and children. These were inspecting something on the ground, and chattering excitedly. The words of dire import, "She have possessed him with a devil," struck their ear. But soon they caught sight of Miss Gale, and were dead silent. She said, "What is the matter? Oh, I see; the vermifuge has acted."

It was so; a putty-faced boy had been unable to eat his breakfast; had suffered malaise for hours afterwards, and at last had been seized with nausea, and had restored to the world they so adorn a number of amphibia, which now, to judge by their movements, bitterly regretted the reckless impatience with which they had fled from an unpleasant medicine to a cold-hearted world.

"Well, good people," said Miss Gale, "what are you making a fuss about? Are they better in the boy, or out of him?"

The women could not find their candor at a moment's notice, but old Giles replied heartily, "Why, hout! better an empty house than a bad tenant."

"That is true," said half a dozen voices at once. They could resist common-sense in its liquid form, but not when solidified into a proverb.

"Catch me the boy," said Miss Gale, severely.

Habitual culpability destroys self-confidence; so the boy suspected himself of crime, and instantly took to flight. His companions loved hunting; so three swifter boys followed him with a cheerful yell, secured him, and brought him up for sentence.

"Don't be frightened, Jacob," said the doctress;

"I only want to know whether you feel better or worse."

His mother put in her word. "He was ever so bad all the morning."

"Hold your jaw," said old Giles, "and let the boy tell his own tale."

"Well, then," said Jacob, "I was mortal bad, but now I do feel like a feather; wust on't is, I be so blessed hungry now. Dall'd if I couldn't eat the devil — stuffed with thunder and lightning."

"I'll prescribe accordingly," said Miss Gale, and wrote in pencil an order on a beef-steak pie they had sent her from the Court.

The boy's companions put their heads together over this order, and offered their services to escort him.

"No, thank you," said the doctress; "he will go alone, you young monkeys. Your turn will come."

Then she proceeded on her rounds, with Mr. Severne at her heels, until it was past one o'clock.

Then she turned round and faced him. "We will part here," said she, "and I will explain my conduct to you, as you seem in the dark. I have been co-operating with Miss Vizard all this time. I reckon she sent you out of the way to give Lord Uxmoor his opportunity, so I have detained you. Whilst you have been studying medicine, he has been popping the question, of course. Good-by, Mr. Villain."

Her words went through the man like cold steel. It was one woman reading another. He turned very white, and put his hand to his heart. But he recovered himself, and said, "If she prefers another to me, I must submit. It is not my absence for a few hours that will make the difference. You cannot make me regret the hours I have passed in your company. Good-by;" and he seemed to leave her very reluctantly.

"One word," said she, softening a little. "I'm not proof against your charm. Unless I see Zoe Vizard in danger, you have nothing to fear from me. But I love *her*, you understand."

He returned to her directly, and said, in most earnest, supplicating tones, "But will you ever forgive me?"

"I will try."

And so they parted.

He went home at a great rate; for Miss Gale's insinuations had raised some fear in his breast.

Meantime this is what had really passed between Zoe and Lord Uxmoor. Vizard went to his study, and Fanny retired at a signal from Zoe. She rose, but did not go; she walked slowly towards the window: Uxmoor joined her; for he saw he was to have his answer from her mouth.

Her bosom heaved a little, and her cheek flushed. "Lord Uxmoor," she said, "you have done me the greatest honor any man can pay a woman, and from you it is indeed an honor. I could not write such an answer as I could wish; and, besides, I wish to spare you all the mortification I can."

"Ah!" said Uxmoor, piteously.

"You are worthy of any lady's love; but I have only my esteem to give you, and that was given long ago."

Uxmoor, who had been gradually turning very white, faltered, "I had my fears. Good-by."

She gave him her hand. He put it respectfully to his lips; then turned and left her, sick at heart, but too brave to let it be seen. He preferred her esteem to her pity.

By this means he got both. She put her handkerchief to her eyes without disguise. But he only turned at the door to say, in a pretty firm voice, "God bless you!"

In less than an hour he drove his team from the door, sitting heart-broken and desolate, but firm and unflinching as a rock.

So then, on his return from Hillstoke, Severne found them all at luncheon except Uxmoor. He detailed his visit to Miss Gale, and, whilst he talked, observed. Zoe was beaming with love and kindness. He felt sure she had not deceived him. He learned, by merely listening, that Lord Uxmoor was gone, and he exulted inwardly.

After luncheon, elysium. He walked with the two girls, and Fanny lagged behind; and Zoe proved herself no coquette. A coquette would have been a little cross, and shown him she had made a sacrifice. Not so Zoe Vizard. She never told him, nor even Fanny, she had refused Lord Uxmoor. She esteemed the great sacrifice she had made for him as a little one, and so loved him a little more, that he had cost her an earl's coronet and a large fortune.

The party resumed their habits that Uxmoor had interrupted; and no warning voice was raised.

The boring commenced at Hillstoke, and Doctress Gale hovered over the work. The various strata and their fossil deposits were an endless study, and kept her microscope employed. With this, and her treatise on "Cure by Esculents," she was so employed that she did not visit the Court for some days: then came an invitation from Lord Uxmoor to stay a week with him, and inspect his village. She accepted it, and drove herself in the bailiff's gig, all alone. She found her host attending to his duties, but dejected; so then she suspected, and turned the conversation to Zoe Vizard, and soon satisfied herself he had no hopes in that quarter. Yet he spoke of her with undisguised and tender admiration. Then she said to herself, "This is a man, and he shall have her."

She sat down and wrote a letter to Vizard, telling him all she knew, and what she thought — viz., that another woman, and a respectable one, had a claim on Mr. Severne, which ought to be closely inquired into, *and the lady's version heard.* "Think of it," said she. "He disowned the woman who had saved his life, he was so afraid I should tell Miss Vizard under what circumstances I first saw him."

She folded and addressed the letter.

But, having relieved her mind, in some degree, by this, she asked herself whether it would not be kinder to all parties to try and save Zoe without an exposure. Probably Severne benefited by his grace and his disarming qualities; for her ultimate resolution was to give him a chance — offer him an alternative: he must either quietly retire, or be openly exposed.

So then she put the letter in her desk, made out her visit, of which no further particulars can be given at present, returned home, and walked down to the Court next morning, to have it out with Edward Severne.

But unfortunately, from the very day she offered him terms up to Hillstoke, the tide began to run in Severne's favor with great rapidity.

A letter came from the detective. Severne received it at breakfast, and laid it before Zoe, which had a favorable effect on her mind to begin.

Poikilus reported that the money was in good hands. He had seen the lady. She made no secret of the thing: the sum was forty-nine hundred pounds, and she said half belonged to her and half to a gentleman. She did not know him, but her agent, Ashmead, did. Poikilus added that he had asked her would she honor that gentleman's draft? She had replied she should be afraid to do that; but Mr. Ashmead should hand it to him on

demand. Poikilus summed up that the lady was evidently respectable, and the whole thing square.

Severne posted this letter to his cousin, under cover, to show him he was really going to clear his estate; but begged him to return it immediately, and lend him fifty pounds. The accommodating cousin sent him fifty pounds, to aid him in wooing his heiress. He bought her a hoop-ring, apologized for its small value, and expressed his regret that all he could offer her was on as small a scale, except his love.

She blushed and smiled on him, like heaven opening. "Small and great, I take them," said she, and her lovely head rested on his shoulder.

They were engaged.

From that hour he could command a *tête-à-tête* with her whenever he chose, and his infernal passion began to suggest all manner of wild, wicked, and unreasonable hopes.

Meantime there was no stopping. He soon found he must speak seriously to Vizard. He went into his study, and began to open the subject. Vizard stopped him. "Fetch the other culprit," said he; and when Zoe came, blushing, he said, "Now I am going to make shorter work of this than you have done. Zoe has ten thousand pounds. What have you got?"

"Only a small estate, worth eight thousand pounds, that I hope to clear of all incumbrances, if I can get my money."

"Fond of each other? — Well, don't strike me dead with your eyes. I have watched you, and, I own, a prettier pair of turtle-doves I never saw. Well, you have got love, and I have got money. I'll take care of you both. But you must live with me. I promise never to marry."

This brought Zoe round his neck, with tears and kisses

of pure affection. He returned them and parted her hair paternally.

"This is a beautiful world, isn't it?" said he, with more tenderness than cynicism this time.

"Ah, that it is!" said Zoe, earnestly. "But I can't have you say you will never be as happy as I am. There are true hearts in this heavenly world; for I have found one."

"I have not, and don't mean to try again. I am going in for the paternal now. You two are my children. I have a talisman to keep me from marrying. I'll show it you." He drew a photograph from his drawer, set round with gold and pearls. He showed it them suddenly. They both started. A fine photograph of Ina Klosking. She was dressed as plainly as at the gambling-table; but without a bonnet, and only one rose in her hair. Her noble forehead was shown, and her face a model of intelligence, womanliness, and serene dignity.

He gazed at it, and they at him and it.

He kissed it. "Here is my fate," said he. "Now mark the ingenuity of a parent. I keep out of my fate's way. But I use her to keep off any other little fates that may be about. No other humbug can ever catch me while I have such a noble humbug as this to contemplate. Ah! and here she is as Siebel. What a goddess! just look at her! Adorable! There, this shall stand upon my table, and the other shall be hung in my bedroom. Then, my dear Zoe, you will be safe from a stepmother, for I am your father now. Please understand that."

This brought poor Zoe round his neck again with such an effusion, that at last he handed her to Severne, and he led her from the room, quite overcome, and, to avoid all conversation about what had just passed, gave her over to Fanny, whilst he retired to compose himself.

By dinner-time he was as happy as a prince again, and relieved of all compunction.

He heard afterwards, from Fanny, that Zoe and she had discussed the incident, and Vizard's infatuation, Fanny being especially wroth at Vizard's abuse of pearls; but she told him she had advised Zoe not to mention that lady's name, but let her die out.

And, in point of fact, Zoe did avoid the subject.

There came an eventful day. Vizard got a letter, at breakfast, from his banker's, that made him stare, and then knit his brows. It was about Edward Severne's acceptances. He said nothing, but ordered his horse, and rode into Taddington.

The day was keen, but sunny; and, seeing him afoot so early, Zoe said she should like a drive before luncheon. She would show Severne and Fanny some ruins on Pagnell Hill. They could leave the trap at the village inn, and walk up the hill. Fanny begged off, and Severne was very glad. The prospect of a long walk up a hill with Zoe, and then a day spent in utter seclusion with her, fired his imagination, and made his heart beat. Here was one of the opportunities he had long sighed for, of making passionate love to innocence and inexperience.

Zoe herself was eager for the drive, and came down, followed by Rosa with some wraps, and waited in the morning-room for the dog-cart. It was behind time for once, because the careful coachman had insisted on the axle being oiled. At last the sound of wheels was heard. A carriage drew up at the door.

"Tell Mr. Severne," said Zoe. "He is in the dining-room, I think."

But it was not the dog-cart.

A vigilant footman came hastily out, and opened the

hall-door. A lady was on the steps, and spoke to him, but, in speaking, she caught sight of Zoe in the hall. She instantly slipped past the man, and stood within the great door.

"Miss Vizard?" said she.

Zoe took a step towards her, and said, with astonishment, "Mademoiselle Klosking!"

The ladies looked at each other; and Zoe saw something strange was coming, for the Klosking was very pale, yet firm, and fixed her eyes upon her as if there was nothing else in sight.

"You have a visitor — Mr. Severne?"

"Yes," said Zoe, drawing up.

"Can I speak with him?"

"He will answer for himself. EDWARD!"

At her call Severne came out hastily behind Ina Klosking.

She turned, and they faced each other.

"Ah!" she cried; and, in spite of all, there was more of joy than any other passion in the exclamation.

Not so he. He uttered a scream of dismay, and staggered, white as a ghost, but still glared at Ina Klosking.

Zoe's voice fell on him like a clap of thunder: "What! — Edward! — Mr. Severne — has this lady still any right" —

"No, none whatever!" he cried; "it is all past and gone."

"What is past?" said Ina Klosking, grandly. "Are you out of your senses?"

Then she was close to him in a moment, by one grand movement, and took him by both lapels of his coat, and held him firmly. "Speak before this lady," she cried. "Have — I — no — rights — over you?" and her voice was majestic, and her Danish eyes gleamed lightning.

The wretch's knees gave way a moment, and he shook

in her hands. Then, suddenly, he turned wild. "Fiend! you have ruined me!" he yelled; and then, with his natural strength, which was great, and the superhuman power of mad excitement, he whirled her right round, and flung her from him, and dashed out of the door, uttering cries of rage and despair.

The unfortunate lady, thus taken by surprise, fell heavily, and, by cruel ill-luck, struck her temple, in falling, against the sharp corner of a marble table. It gashed her forehead fearfully, and she lay senseless, with the blood spurting in jets from her white temple.

Zoe screamed violently; and the hall and the hall-staircase seemed to fill by magic.

In the terror and confusion, Harrington Vizard strode into the hall, from Taddington. "What is the matter?" he cried; "a woman killed?"

Some one cried out she had fallen.

"Water, fools! a sponge! don't stand gaping!" and he flung himself on his knees, and raised the woman's head from the floor. One eager look into her white face — one wild cry — "Great God! — it is" — He had recognized her.

## CHAPTER XXII.

It was piteous to see, and hear. The blood would not stop; it spurted no longer, but flowed alarmingly. Vizard sent Harris off in his own fly for a doctor, to save time. He called for ice. He cried out in agony to his servants, "Can none of you think of anything? There — that hat. Here, you women! tear me the nap off with your fingers. My God! — what is to be done? She'll bleed to death." And he held her to his breast, and almost moaned with pity over her, as he pressed the cold sponge to her wound — in vain; for still the red blood would flow.

Wheels ground the gravel. Servants flew to the door, crying, "The doctor! the doctor!"

As if he could have been fetched in five minutes from three miles off.

Yet it was a doctor. Harris had met Miss Gale walking quietly down from Hillstoke. He had told her in a few hurried words, and brought her as fast as the horses could go.

She glided in swiftly, keen, but self-possessed, and took it all in directly.

Vizard saw her, and cried, "Ah! help! — she is bleeding to death!"

"She shall not," said Rhoda. Then to one footman, "Bring a footstool, *you*;" to another, "*You* bring me a cork;" to Vizard, "*You* hold her towards me so. Now sponge the wound."

This done, she pinched the lips of the wound together with her neat strong fingers. "See what I do," she said

to Vizard. "You will have to do it whilst I — ah, the stool! Now lay her head on that; the other side, man. Now, sir, compress the wound as I did, vigorously. Hold the cork, *you*, till I want it."

She took out of her pocket some adhesive plaster, and flakes of some strong styptic, and a piece of elastic. "Now," said she, to Vizard, "give me a little opening in the middle to plaster these strips across the wound." He did so. Then in a moment she passed the elastic under the sufferer's head, drew it over with the styptic between her finger and thumb, and crack; the styptic was tight on the compressed wound; she forced in more styptic, increasing the pressure, then she whipped out a sort of surgical housewife, and with some cutting instrument reduced the cork, then cut it convex, and fastened it on the styptic by another elastic. There was no flutter, yet it was all done in fifty seconds.

"There," said she, "she will bleed no more to speak of. Now, seat her upright— Why! I have seen her before. This is — sir, you can send the men away."

"Yes; and, Harris, pack up Mr. Severne's things, and bring them down here this moment."

The male servants retired, the women held aloof. Fanny Dover came forward, pale and trembling, and helped to place Ina Klosking in the hall porter's chair. She was insensible still, but moaned faintly.

Her moans were echoed: all eyes turned. It was Zoe, seated apart, all bowed and broken — ghastly pale, and glaring straight before her.

"Poor girl!" said Vizard. "We forgot her. It is her heart that bleeds. Where is the scoundrel, that I may kill him?" and he rushed out at the door to look for him. The man's life would not have been worth much, if Squire Vizard could have found him then.

But he soon came back to his wretched home, and eyed

the dismal scene, and the havoc one man had made: the marble floor all stained with blood; Ina Klosking supported in a chair, white, and faintly moaning; Zoe still crushed, and glaring at vacancy, and Fanny sobbing round her with pity and terror; for she knew there must be worse to come than this wild stupor.

"Take her to her room, Fanny dear," said Vizard, in a hurried, faltering voice; "and don't leave her. Rosa, help Miss Dover. Do not leave her alone, night nor day." Then to Miss Gale, "She will live? Tell me she will live."

"I hope so," said Rhoda Gale. "Oh! the blow will not kill her; nor yet the loss of blood. But I fear there will be distress of mind added to the bodily shock. And such a noble face! My own heart bleeds for her. Oh, sir! do not send her away to strangers. Let me take her up to the farm. It is nursing she will need, and tact, when she comes to herself."

"Send her away to strangers!" cried Vizard. "Never! No, not even to the farm. Here she received her wound; here all that you and I can do shall be done to save her. Ah, here's Harris with the villain's things. Get the lady's boxes out, and put Mr. Severne's into the fly. Give the man two guineas, and let him leave them at the 'Swan,' in Taddington."

He then beckoned down the women, and had Ina Klosking carried up-stairs to the very room Severne had occupied.

He then convened the servants, and placed them formally under Miss Gale's orders; and one female servant having made a remark, he turned her out of the house neck and crop directly with her month's wages. The others had to help her pack, only half an hour being allowed for her exit.

The house seemed all changed. Could this be Vizard

Court? Dead gloom — hurried whispers — and everybody walking softly, and scared — none knowing what might be the next calamity.

Vizard felt sick at heart and helpless. He had done all he could, and was reduced to that condition women bear far better than men, — he must wait, and hope, and fear. He walked up and down the carpeted landing, racked with anxiety.

At last there came a single scream of agony from Ina Klosking's room.

It made the strong man quake.

He tapped softly at the door.

Rhoda opened it.

"What is it?" he faltered.

She replied, gravely, "Only what must be. She is beginning to realize what has befallen her. Don't come here; you can do no good. I will run down to you, whenever I dare. Give me a nurse to help this first night."

He went down, and sent into the village for a woman who bore a great name for nursing. Then he wandered about, disconsolate.

The leaden hours passed. He went to dress, and discovered Ina Klosking's blood upon his clothes. It shocked him first, and then it melted him: he felt an inexpressible tenderness at sight of it. The blood that had flowed in her veins seemed sacred to him. He folded that suit, and tied it up in a silk handkerchief, and locked it away.

In due course he sat down to dinner; we are all such creatures of habit. There was everything as usual, except the familiar faces. There was the glittering plate on the polished sideboard, the pyramid of flowers surrounded with fruits. There were even chairs at the table, for the servants did not know he was to be quite

alone. But he was. One delicate dish after another was brought him, and sent away untasted. Soon after dinner, Rhoda Gale came down, and told him her patient was in a precarious condition; and she feared fever and delirium. She begged him to send one servant up to the farm for certain medicaments she had there, and another to the chemist at Taddington. These were despatched on swift horses; and both were back in half an hour.

By and by Fanny Dover came down to him with red eyes, and brought him Zoe's love. "But," said she, "don't ask her to come down. She is ashamed to look anybody in the face, poor girl."

"Why? what has *she* done?"

"O Harrington! she has made no secret of her affection; and now, at sight of that woman, he has abandoned her."

"Tell her I love her more than I ever did, and respect her more. Where is her pride?"

"Pride! she is full of it; and it will help her, by and by. But she has a bitter time to go through first. You don't know how she loves him."

"What! love him still, after what he has done?"

"Yes. She interprets it this way and that. She cannot bear to believe another woman has any real right to separate them."

"Separate them! The scoundrel knocked *her* down for loving him still, and fled from them both. Was ever guilt more clear? If she doubts that he is a villain, tell her from me that he is a forger, and has given me bills with false names on them. The bankers gave me notice to-day, and I was coming home to order him out of the house, when this miserable business happened."

"A forger! is it possible?" said Fanny. "But it is no use my telling her that sort of thing. If he had committed murder, and was true to her, she would cling

to him. She never knew till now how she loved him, nor I either. She put him in Coventry for telling a lie; but she was far more unhappy all the time than he was. There is nothing to do but to be kind to her, and let her hide her face. Don't hurry her."

"Not I. God help her! If she has a wish, it shall be gratified. I am powerless. She is young. Surely, time will cure her of a villain, now he is detected."

Fanny said she hoped so.

The truth is, Zoe had not opened her heart to Fanny: she clung to her, and writhed in her arms; but she spoke little; and one broken sentence contradicted the other. But mental agony, like bodily, finds its vent, not in speech, the brain's great interpreter, but in inarticulate cries and moans and sighs that prove us animals even in the throes of mind. Zoe was in that cruel state of suffering.

So passed that miserable day.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

Ina Klosking recovered her senses that evening, and asked Miss Gale where she was. Miss Gale told her she was in the house of a friend.

"What friend?"

"That," said Miss Gale, "I will tell you by and by. You are in good hands, and I am your physician."

"I have heard your voice before," said Ina; "but I know not where, and it is so dark. Why is it so dark?"

"Because too much light is not good for you. You have met with an accident."

"What accident, madam?"

"You fell, and hurt your poor forehead. See, I have bandaged it, and now you must let me wet the bandage — to keep your brow cool."

"Thank you, madam," said Ina, in her own sweet but queenly way; "you are very good to me. I wish I could see your face more clearly. I know your voice." Then, after a silence, during which Miss Gale eyed her with anxiety, she said, like one groping her way to the truth, "I — fell — and — hurt — my — forehead? — *Ah!*"

Then it was she uttered the cry that made Vizard quake at the door, and shook, for a moment, even Rhoda's nerves, though, as a rule, they were iron in a situation of this kind.

It had all come back to Ina Klosking.

After that piteous cry, she never said a word. She did nothing but think, and put her hand to her head.

And soon after midnight she began to talk incoherently.

The physician could only proceed by physical means. She attacked the coming fever at once, with the remedies of the day, and also with an infusion of monk's-hood. That poison, promptly administered, did not deceive her. She obtained a slight perspiration, which was so much gained in the battle.

In the morning she got the patient shifted into another bed, and she slept a little after that. But soon she was awake, restless, and raving: still her character pervaded her delirium. No violence. Nothing any sore-injured woman need be ashamed to have said: only it was all disconnected. One moment she was speaking to the leader of the orchestra — at another to Mr. Ashmead — at another, with divine tenderness, to her still faithful Severne. And though not hurried, as usual in these cases, it was almost incessant and pitiable to hear, each observation was so wise and good, yet, all being disconnected, the hearer could not but feel that a noble mind lay before him, overthrown and broken into fragments like some Attic column.

In the middle of this the handle was softly turned, and Zoe Vizard came in pale and sombre.

Long before this, she had said to Fanny, several times, "I ought to go and see her;" and Fanny had said, "Of course you ought."

So now she came. She folded her arms, and stood at the foot of the bed, and looked at her unhappy rival, unhappy as possible herself.

What contrary feelings fought in that young breast! Pity and hatred. She must hate the rival who had come between her and him she loved; she must pity the woman who lay there, pale, wounded, and little likely to recover.

And with all this, a great desire to know whether this sufferer had any right to come and seize Edward Severne

by the arm, and so draw down calamity on both the women who loved him.

She looked and listened, and Rhoda Gale thought it hard upon her patient.

But it was not in human nature the girl should do otherwise: so Rhoda said nothing.

What fell from Ina's lips was not of a kind to make Zoe more her friend.

Her mind seemed now like a bird tied by a long silken thread. It made large excursions, but constantly came back to her love. Sometimes that love was happy, sometimes unhappy. Often she said "Edward" in the exquisite tone of a loving woman; and, whenever she did, Zoe received it with a sort of shiver, as if a dagger, fine as a needle, had passed through her whole body.

At last, after telling some tenor that he had sung F natural instead of F sharp, and praised somebody's rendering of a song in *Il flauto magico*, and told Ashmead to make no more engagements for her at present, for she was going to Vizard Court, the poor soul paused a minute, and uttered a deep moan.

"*Struck down by the very hand that was vowed to protect me!*" said she. Then was silent again. Then began to cry, and sob, and wring her hands.

Zoe put her hand to her heart, and moved feebly towards the door. However, she stopped a moment to say, "I am no use here. You would soon have me raving in the next bed. I will send Fanny." Then she drew herself up. "Miss Gale, everybody here is at your command. Pray spare nothing you can think of to save — *my brother's guest.*"

There came out the bitter drop.

When she had said that, she stalked from the room like some red Indian bearing a mortal arrow in him, but too proud to show it.

But when she got to her own room, she flung herself on her sofa, and writhed and sobbed in agony.

Fanny Dover came in and found her so, and flew to her.

But she ordered her out quite wildly. "No, no; go to *her*, like all the rest, and leave poor Zoe all alone. She *is* alone."

Then Fanny clung to her, and tried hard to comfort her.

This young lady now became very zealous and active. She divided her time between the two sufferers, and was indefatigable in their service. When she was not supporting Zoe, she was always at Miss Gale's elbow offering her services. "Do let me help you," she said; "do pray let me help. We are poor at home, and there is nothing I cannot do. I'm worth any three servants."

She always helped shift the patient into a fresh bed, and that was done very often. She would run to the cook or the butler for anything that was wanted in a hurry. She flung gentility and humbug to the winds. Then she dressed in ten minutes, and went and dined with Vizard, and made excuses for Zoe's absence, to keep everything smooth: and finally, she insisted on sitting up with Ina Klosking till three in the morning, and made Miss Gale go to bed in the room. "Paid nurses!" said she; "they are no use except to snore, and drink the patient's wine. You and I will watch her every moment of the night; and if I'm ever at a loss what to do, I will call you."

Miss Gale stared at her once, and then accepted this new phase of her character.

The fever was hot while it lasted; but it was so encountered with tonics, and port wine, and strong beef-soup — not your rubbishy beef-tea — that in forty-eight hours it began to abate. Ina recognized Rhoda Gale as the lady

who had saved Severne's life at Montpellier, and wept long and silently upon her neck. In due course, Zoe, hearing there was a great change, came in again to look at her. She stood and eyed her. Soon Ina Klosking caught sight of her, and stared at her.

"You here!" said she. "Ah! you are Miss Vizard. I am in your house. I will get up and leave it;" and she made a feeble attempt to rise, but fell back, and the tears welled out of her eyes at her helplessness.

Zoe was indignant, but for the moment more shocked than anything else. She moved away a little, and did not know what to say.

"Let me look at you," said the patient. "Ah! you are beautiful. When I saw you at the theatre you fascinated me; how much more a man? I will resist no more. You are too beautiful to be resisted. Take him, and let me die."

"I do her no good," said Zoe, half sullenly, half trembling.

"Indeed you do not," said Rhoda, bluntly, and almost bitterly. She was all nurse.

"I'll come here no more," said Zoe, sadly, but sternly, and left the room.

Then Ina turned to Miss Gale and said, patiently, "I hope I was not rude to that lady — who has broken my heart."

Fanny and Rhoda took each a hand, and told her she could not be rude to anybody.

"My friends," said Ina, looking piteously at each in turn, "it is her house, you know, and she is very good to me now — after breaking my heart."

Then Fanny showed a deal of tact. "*Her* house!" said she; "it is no more hers than mine. Why, this house belongs to a gentleman, and he is mad after music. He knows you very well, though you don't know him, and he thinks you the first singer in Europe."

"You flatter me," said Ina sadly.

"Well, he thinks so; and he is reckoned a very good judge. Ah! now I think of it, I will show you something, and then you will believe me."

She ran off to the library, snatched up Ina's picture, set round with pearls, and came panting in with it. "There," said she; "now, you look at that!" and she put it before her eyes. "Now, who is that, if you please?"

"Oh! it is Ina Klosking that was. Please bring me a glass."

The two ladies looked at each other. Miss Gale made a negative signal, and Fanny said, "By and by. This will do instead, for it is as like as two peas. Now, ask yourself how this comes to be in the house, and set in pearls. Why, they are worth three hundred pounds. I assure you that the master of this house is *fanatico per la musica;* heard you sing Siebel at Homburg — raved about you — wanted to call on you; we had to drag him away from the place; and he declares you are the first singer in the world; and you cannot doubt his sincerity, for *here are the pearls.*"

Ina Klosking's pale cheek colored, and then she opened her two arms wide, and put them round Fanny's neck and kissed her. Her innocent vanity was gratified, and her gracious nature suggested gratitude to her who had brought her the compliment, instead of the usual ungrateful bumptiousness praise elicits from vanity.

Then Miss Gale put in her word — "When you met with this unfortunate accident, I was for taking you up to my house. It is three miles off; but he would not hear of it. He said, 'No; here she got her wound, and here she must be cured.'"

"So," said Fanny, "pray set your mind at ease. My cousin Harrington is a very good soul, but rather arbi-

trary. If you want to leave this place, you must get thoroughly well and strong; for he will never let you go till you are."

Between these two ladies, clever and co-operating, Ina smiled, and seemed relieved; but she was too weak to converse any more just then.

Some hours afterwards she beckoned Fanny to her, and said, "The master of the house — what is his name?"

"Harrington Vizard."

"What! *her* father!"

"La, no; only her half-brother."

"If he is so kind to me because I sing, why comes he not to see me? *She* has come."

Fanny smiled. "It is plain you are not an Englishwoman, though you speak it so beautifully. An English gentleman does not intrude into a lady's room."

"It is his room."

"He would say that whilst you occupy it, it is yours, and not his."

"He awaits my invitation then?"

"I dare say he would come if you were to invite him, but certainly not without."

"I wish to see him who has been so kind to me, and so loves music; but not to-day — I feel unable."

The next day she asked for a glass, and was distressed at her appearance. She begged for a cap.

"What kind of cap?" asked Fanny.

"One like that," said she, pointing to a portrait on the wall. It was of a lady in a plain brown silk dress, and a little white shawl, and a neat cap with a narrow lace border all round her face.

This particular cap was out of date full sixty years; but the house had a storeroom of relics, and Fanny, with Vizard's help, soon rummaged out a cap of the sort, with a narrow frill all round.

Her hair was smoothed, a white silk band passed over the now closed wound, and the cap fitted on her. She looked pale but angelic.

Fanny went down to Vizard, and invited him to come and see Mademoiselle Klosking — by her desire. "But," she added, "Miss Gale is very anxious, lest you should get talking of Severne. She says the fever and loss of blood have weakened her terribly; and if we bring the fever on again, she cannot answer for her life."

"Has she spoken of him to you?"

"Not once."

"Then why should she to me?"

"Because you are a man, and she may think to get the *truth* out of you; she knows *we* shall only say what is for the best. She is very deep, and we don't know her mind yet."

Vizard said he would be as guarded as he could; but if they saw him going wrong, they must send him away.

"Oh, Miss Gale will do that, you may be sure," said Fanny.

Thus prepared, Vizard followed Fanny up the stairs to the sick-room.

Either there is such a thing as love at first sight, or it is something more than first sight when an observant man gazes at a woman for an hour in a blaze of light, and drinks in her looks, her walk, her voice, and all the outward signs of a beautiful soul; for the stout cynic's heart beat at entering that room, as it had not beat for years. To be sure he had not only seen her on the stage in all her glory, but had held her, pale and bleeding, to his manly breast, and his heart warmed to her all the more, and, indeed, fairly melted with tenderness.

Fanny went in and announced him. He followed softly, and looked at her.

Wealth can make even a sickroom pretty.

The Klosking lay on snowy pillows whose glossy damask was edged with lace, and upon her form was an eider-down quilt covered with violet-colored satin, and her face was set in that sweet cap which hid her wound, and made her eloquent face less ghastly.

She turned to look at him, and he gazed at her in a way that spoke volumes.

"A seat," said she softly.

Fanny was for putting one close to her.

"No," said Miss Gale, "lower down; then she need not turn her head."

So he sat down nearer her feet.

"My good host," said she in her mellow voice, that retained its quality but not its power, "I desire to thank you for your goodness to a poor singer, struck down — by the hand that was bound to protect her."

Vizard faltered out that there was nothing to thank him for. He was proud to have her under his roof, thongh deeply grieved at the cause.

She looked at him, and her two nurses looked at her, and at each other, as much as to say, "She is going upon dangerous ground."

They were right. But she had not the courage; or, perhaps — as most women are a little cat-like in this, that they go away once or twice from the subject nearest their heart, before they turn and pounce on it — she must speak of other things first. Said she, "But, if I was unfortunate in that, I was fortunate in this, that I fell into good hands. These ladies are sisters to me," and she gave Miss Gale her hand, and kissed the other hand to Fanny, though she could scarcely lift it; "and I have a host who loves music, and overrates my poor ability." Then after a pause, "What have you heard me sing?"

"Siebel."

"Only Siebel! why, that is a poor little thing."

"So *I* thought, till I heard you sing it."

"And, after Siebel, you bought my photograph."

"Instantly."

"And wasted pearls on it."

"No, madam; I wasted it on pearls."

"If I were well, I should call that extravagant. But it is permitted to flatter the sick. It is kind. Me you overrate, I fear; but you do well to honor music. Ay, I, who lie here wounded and broken-hearted, do thank God for music. Our bodies are soon crushed; our loves decay, or turn to hate; but art is immortal."

She could no longer roll this out in her grand contralto; but she could still raise her eyes with enthusiasm, and her pale face was illuminated. A grand soul shone through her, though she was pale, weak, and prostrate.

They admired her in silence.

After a while she resumed, and said, "If I live, I must live for my art alone."

Miss Gale saw her approaching a dangerous topic; so she said hastily, "Don't say *if* you live, please, because that is arranged. You have been out of danger this twenty-four hours, provided you do not relapse; and I must take care of that."

"My kind friend," said Ina, "I shall not relapse; only my weakness is pitiable. Sometimes I can scarcely forbear crying, I feel so weak. When shall I be stronger?"

"You shall be a little stronger every three days. There are always ups and downs in convalescence."

"When shall I be strong enough to move?"

"Let me answer that question," said Vizard. "When you are strong enough to sing us Siebel's great song."

"There," said Fanny Dover, "there is a mercenary host for you. He means to have a song out of you. Till then you are his prisoner."

"No, no, she is mine," said Miss Gale; "and she shan't

go till she has sung me 'Hail Columbia!' None of your Italian trash for me."

Ina smiled, and said it was a fair condition, provided that "Hail Columbia," with which composition unfortunately she was unacquainted, was not beyond her powers. "I have often sung for money," said she, "but this time" — here she opened her grand arms, and took Rhoda Gale to her bosom — "I shall sing for love."

"Now we have settled that," said Vizard, "my mind is more at ease, and I will retire."

"One moment," said Ina, turning to him. Then in a low and very meaning voice, "*There is something else.*"

"No doubt there is plenty," said Miss Gale sharply; "and, by my authority, I postpone it all till you are stronger. Bid us good-by for the present, Mr. Vizard."

"I obey," said he. "But, madam, please remember I am always at your service. Send for me when you please, and the oftener the better for me."

"Thank you, my kind host. Oblige me with your hand."

He gave her his hand. She took it, and put her lips to it with pure and gentle and seemly gratitude, and with no loss of dignity, though the act was humble.

He turned his head away, to hide the emotion that act and the touch of her sweet lips caused him; Miss Gale hurried him out of the room.

"You naughty patient," said she, "you must do nothing to excite yourself."

"Sweet physician, loving nurse, I am not excited."

Miss Gale felt her heart to see.

"Gratitude does not excite," said Ina. "It is too tame a feeling in the best of us."

"That is a fact," said Miss Gale; "so let us all be grateful, and avoid exciting topics. Think what *I* should feel if you had a relapse. Why, you would break my heart."

"Should I?"

"I really think you would, tough as it is. One gets so fond of an unselfish patient. You cannot think how rare they are, dear. You are a pearl. I cannot afford to lose you."

"Then you shall not," said Ina, firmly. "Know that I, who seem so weak, am a woman of great resolution. I will follow good counsel; I will postpone all dangerous topics till I am stronger; I will live. For I will not grieve the true friends calamity has raised me."

Of course Fanny told Zoe all about this interview. She listened gloomily: and all she said was, "Sisters do not go for much, when a man is in love."

"Do brothers, when a woman is?" said Fanny.

"I dare say they go for as much as they are worth."

"Zoe, that is not fair. Harrington is full of affection for you; but you will not go near him. Any other man would be very angry. Do pray make an effort, and come down to dinner to-day."

"No, no; he has you, and his Klosking; and I have my broken heart. I *am* alone; and so I will be all alone."

She cried and sobbed, but she was obstinate, and Fanny could only let her have her own way in that.

Another question was soon disposed of. When Fanny invited her into the sick-room, she said, haughtily, "I go there no more. Cure her, and send her away, if Harrington will let her go. I dare say she is to be pitied."

"Of course she is. She is your fellow-victim, if you would only let yourself see it."

"Unfortunately, instead of pitying her, I hate her. She has destroyed my happiness, and done herself no good. He does not love her, and never will."

Fanny found herself getting angry, so she said no

more; for she was determined nothing should make her quarrel with poor Zoe. But after dinner, being *tête-à-tête* with Vizard, she told him she was afraid Zoe could not see things as they were; and she asked him if he had any idea what had become of Severne.

"Fled the country, I suppose."

"Are you sure he is not lurking about?"

"What for?"

"To get a word with Zoe — alone."

"He will not come near this. I will break every bone in his skin if he does."

"But he is so sly; he might hang about."

"What for? She never goes out; and, if she did, have you so poor an opinion of her as to think she would speak to him?"

"Oh, no; and she would forbid him to speak to her. But he would be sure to persist, and he has such wonderful powers of explanation, and she is blinded by love; I think he would make her believe black was white, if he had a chance; and if he is about he will get a chance some day. She is doing the very worst thing she could — shutting herself up so. Any moment she will turn wild, and rush out reckless. She is in a dangerous state, you mark my words; she is broken-hearted, and yet she is bitter against everybody, except that young villain, and he is the only enemy she has in the world. I don't believe Mademoiselle Klosking ever wronged her, nor never will. Appearances are against her; but she is a good woman, or I am a fool. Take my advice, Harrington, and be on your guard. If he had written a penitent letter to Mademoiselle Klosking, that would be a different thing; but he ignores her, and that frightens me for Zoe."

Harrington would not admit that Zoe needed any other safeguard against a detected scoundrel than her own sense of dignity. He consented, however, to take

precautions, if Fanny would solemnly promise not to tell Zoe, and so wound her. On that condition, he would see his head keeper to-morrow, and all the keepers and watchers should be posted so as to encircle the parish with vigilance. He assured Fanny these fellows had a whole system of signals to the ear and eye, and Severne could not get within a mile of the house undetected. "But," said he, "I will not trust to that alone. I will send an advertisement to the local papers and the leading London journals, so worded, that the scoundrel shall know his forgery is detected, and that he will be arrested on a magistrate's warrant if he sets foot in Barfordshire."

Fanny said that was capital, and, altogether, he had set her mind at rest.

"Then do as much for me," said Vizard. "Please explain a remarkable phenomenon. You were always a bright girl, and no fool; but not exactly what humdrum people would call a good girl. You are not offended?"

"The idea! Why, I have publicly disowned goodness again and again. You have heard me."

"So I have, but was not that rather deceitful of you? for you have turned out as good as gold. Anxiety has kept me at home of late, and I have watched you. You live for others; you are all over the house to serve two suffering *women*. That is real charity, not sexual charity, which humbugs the world, but not me. You are cook, housemaid, butler, nurse, and friend, to both of them. In an interval of your time, so creditably employed, you come and cheer me up with your bright little face, and give me wise advice. I know that women are all humbugs; only you are a humbug reversed, and deserve a statue — and trimmings. You have been passing yourself off for a naughty girl, and all the time you were an extra good one."

"And that puzzles the woman-hater, the cynical student, who says he has fathomed woman. My poor dear Harrington, if you cannot read so shallow a character as I am, how will you get on with those ladies up-stairs, — Zoe, who is as deep as the sea, and turbid with passion — and the Klosking, who is as deep as the ocean?"

She thought a moment, and said, "There, I will have pity on you. You shall understand one woman before you die, and that is me; I'll give you the clew to my seeming inconsistencies — if *you* will give *me* a cigarette."

"What, another hidden virtue! You smoke?"

"Not I, except when I happen to be with a noble soul, who won't tell."

Vizard found her a Russian cigarette, and lighted his own cigar, and she lectured as follows: —

"What women love, and can't do without, if they are young and healthy, and spirited, is — excitement. I am one who pines for it. Now society is so constructed that, to get excitement you must be naughty. Waltzing all night, and flirting all day, are excitement. Crochet, and church, and examining girls in St. Matthew, and dining *en famille,* and going to bed at ten, are stagnation. Good girls — that means stagnant girls; I hate and despise the tame little wretches, and I never was one, and never will be. But now look here; we have two ladies in love with one villain — that is exciting. One gets nearly killed in the house — that is gloriously exciting; the other is broken-hearted. If I were to be a bad girl, and say, 'It is not my business; I will leave them to themselves, and go my little mill round of selfishness as before,' — why, what a fool I must be! I should lose excitement. Instead of that, I run and get things for the Klosking — excitement. I cook for her, and nurse her, and sit up half the night — excitement. Then I run to Zoe, and do my best for her — and get snubbed

— excitement. Then I sit at the head of your table, and order you — excitement. Oh, it is lovely!"

"Shall you not be sorry when they both get well, and routine recommences?"

"Of course I shall; that is the sort of good girl I am. And oh, when that fatal day comes, how I shall flirt! Heaven help my next flirtee! I shall soon flirt out the stigma of a good girl. You mark my words, I shall flirt with some *married man*, after this. I never did that yet. But I shall; I know I shall — ah! — there, I have burned my finger."

"Never mind; that is exciting."

"As such I accept it. Good-by. I must go and relieve Miss Gale. Exit the good girl on her mission of charity; ha! ha! ha!" She hummed a *valse à deux temps*, and went dancing out with such a whirl, that her petticoats, which were ample, and not, as now, like a sack tied at the knees, made quite a cool air in the room.

She had not been gone long, when Miss Gale came down, full of her patient. She wanted to get her out of bed during the daytime; but said she was not strong enough to sit up. Would he order an invalid couch down from London? She described the article, and where it was to be had.

He said Harris should go up in the morning, and bring one down with him.

He then put her several questions about her patient; and at last asked her, with an anxiety he in vain endeavored to conceal, what she thought was the relation between her and Severne?

Now it may be remembered that Miss Gale had once been on the point of telling him all she knew, and had written him a letter. But, at that time, the Klosking was not expected to appear on the scene in person. Were she now to say she had seen her and Severne living

together, Rhoda felt that she should lower her patient. She had not the heart to do that.

Rhoda Gale was not of an amorous temperament, and she was all the more open to female attachments. With a little encouragement she would have loved Zoe, but she had now transferred her affection to the Klosking. She replied to Vizard, almost like a male lover defending the object of his affection, —

"The exact relation is more than I can tell: but I think he has lived upon her, for she was richer than he was; and I feel sure he has promised her marriage. And my great fear now is lest he should get hold of her and keep his promise. He is as poor as a rat, or a female physician: and she has a fortune, in her voice, and has money besides, Miss Dover tells me. Pray keep her here till she is quite well, please."

"I will."

"And then let me have her up at Hillstoke. She is beginning to love me, and I dote on her."

"So do I."

"Ah, but you must not."

"Why not?"

"Because" —

"Well, why not?"

"She is not to love any man again, who will not marry her. I won't let her. I'll kill her first, I love her so: a rogue she shan't marry, and I can't let you marry her, because her connection with that Severne is mysterious. She seems the soul of virtue, but I could not let *you* marry her until things are clearer."

"Make your mind easy. I will not marry her — nor anybody else — till things are a great deal clearer than I have ever found them, where your sex is concerned."

Miss Gale approved the resolution.

Next day, Vizard posted his keepers, and sent his advertisements to the London and country journals.

Fanny came into his study, to tell him there was more trouble — Miss Maitland taken seriously ill, and had written to Zoe.

"Poor old soul!" said Vizard. "I have a great mind to ride over and see her."

"Somebody ought to go," said Fanny.

"Well, you go."

"How can I — with Zoe, and Mademoiselle Klosking, and you, to look after?"

"Instead of one old woman. Not much excitement in that."

"No, cousin. To think of your remembering! Why, you must have gone to bed sober."

"I often do."

"You were always an eccentric land-owner."

"Don't you talk. You are a caricature."

This banter was interrupted by Miss Gale, who came to tell Harrington Mademoiselle Klosking desired to see him, at his leisure.

He said he would come directly.

"Before you go," said Miss Gale, "let us come to an understanding. She had only two days' fever: but that fever, and the loss of blood, and the shock to her nerves, brought her to death's door by exhaustion. Now she is slowly recovering her strength, because she has a healthy stomach, and I give her no stimulants to spur and then weaken her, but choice and simple esculents, the effect of which I watch, and vary them accordingly. But the convalescent period is always one of danger, especially from chills to the body and excitements to the brain. At no period are more patients thrown away for want of vigilance. Now I can guard against chills and other bodily things, but not against excitements — unless

you co-operate. The fact is, we must agree to avoid speaking about Mr. Severne. We must be on our guard. We must parry — we must evade — we must be deaf, stupid, slippery; but no Severne — for five or six days more, at all events."

Thus forewarned, Vizard, in due course, paid his second visit to Ina Klosking.

He found her propped up with pillows this time. She begged him to be seated.

She had evidently something on her mind, and her nurses watched her like cats.

"You are fond of music, sir?"

"Not of all music: I adore good music, I hate bad; and I despise mediocre. Silence is golden indeed, compared with poor music."

"You are right, sir. Have you good music in the house?"

"A little. I get all the operas, and you know there are generally one or two good things in an opera — amongst the rubbish. But the great bulk of our collection is rather old-fashioned. It is sacred music; oratorios, masses, anthems, services, chants. My mother was the collector. Her tastes were good, but narrow. Do you care for that sort of music?"

"Sacred music? Why, it is, of all music, the most divine, and soothes the troubled soul. Can I not see the books? I read music like words. By reading I almost hear."

"We will bring you up a dozen books to begin on."

He went down directly; and such was his pleasure in doing anything for the Klosking, that he executed the order in person, brought up a little pile of folios and quartos, beautifully bound and lettered, a lady having been the collector.

Now, as he mounted the stairs, with his very chin

upon the pile, who should he see looking over the rails at him, but his sister Zoe!

She was sadly changed. There was a fixed ashen pallor on her cheek, and a dark circle under her eyes.

He stopped to look at her. "My poor child," said he, "you look very ill."

"I am very ill, dear."

"Would you not be better for a change?"

"I might."

"Why coop yourself up in your own room? Why deny yourself a brother's sympathy?"

The girl trembled, and tears came to her eyes.

"Is it with me you sympathize?" said she.

"Can you doubt it, Zoe?"

Zoe hung her head a moment, and did not reply. Then she made a diversion. "What are those books? — Oh, I see; your mother's music-books. Nothing is too good for *her*."

"Nothing in the way of music-books is too good for her. For shame! — are you jealous of that unfortunate lady?"

Zoe made no reply.

She put her hands before her face, that Vizard might not see her mind.

Then he rested his books on a table, and came and took her head in his hands paternally. "Do not shut yourself up any longer. Solitude is dangerous to the afflicted. Be more with me than ever; and let this cruel blow bind us more closely, instead of disuniting us."

He kissed her lovingly; and his kind words set her tears flowing. But they did her little good. They were bitter tears. Between her and her brother there was now a barrier sisterly love could not pass. He hated and despised Edward Severne; and she only distrusted him, and feared he was a villain: she loved him still with

every fibre of her heart, and pined for his explanation of all that seemed so dark.

So then he entered the sick-room with his music-books; and Zoe, after watching him in, without seeming to do so, crept away to her own room.

Then there was rather a pretty little scene. Miss Gale and Miss Dover, on each side of the bed, held a heavy music-book, and Mademoiselle Klosking turned the leaves and read, when the composition was worth reading. If it was not, she quietly passed it over, without any injurious comment.

Vizard watched her from the foot of the bed, and could tell in a moment by her face whether the composition was good, bad, or indifferent. When bad, her face seemed to turn impassive, like marble; when good, to expand; and when she lighted on a masterpiece, she was almost transfigured, and her face shone with elevated joy.

This was a study to the enamoured Vizard, and it did not escape the quick-sighted doctress. She despised music on its own merits, but she despised nothing that could be pressed into the service of medicine: and she said to herself, "I'll cure her with esculents and music."

The book was taken away to make room for another.

Then said Ina Klosking, "Mr. Vizard, I desire to say a word to you. Excuse me, my dear friends."

Miss Gale colored up. She had not foreseen a *tête-à-tête* between Vizard and her patient. However, there was no help for it: and she withdrew to a little distance with Fanny; but she said to Vizard, openly and expressively, "Remember!"

When they had withdrawn a little way, Ina Klosking fixed her eyes on Vizard, and said, in a low voice, "Your sister!"

Vizard started a little at the suddenness of this, but he said nothing: he did not know what to say.

When she had waited a little, and he said nothing, she spoke again. "Tell me something about her. Is she good? Forgive me: it is not that I doubt."

"She is good, according to her lights."

"Is she proud?"

"Yes."

"Is she just?"

"No. And I never met a woman that was."

"Indeed it is rare. Why does she not visit me?"

"I don't know."

"She blames me for all that has happened."

"I don't know, madam. My sister looks very ill, and keeps her own room. If she does not visit you, she holds equally aloof from us all. She has not taken a single meal with me for some days."

"Since I was your patient and your guest."

"Pray do not conclude from that— Who can interpret a woman?"

"Another woman. Enigmas to you, we are transparent to each other. Sir, will you grant me a favor? Will you persuade Miss Vizard to see me here alone — all alone? It will be a greater trial to me than to her, for I am weak. In this request I am not selfish. She can do nothing for me; but I can do a little for her, to pay the debt of gratitude I owe this hospitable house. May Heaven bless it, from the roof to the foundation stone!"

"I will speak to my sister: and she shall visit you — with the consent of your physician."

"It is well," said Ina Klosking, and beckoned her friends; one of whom, Miss Gale, proceeded to feel her pulse, with suspicious glances at Vizard. But she found the pulse calm, and said so.

Vizard took his leave, and went straight to Zoe's room. She was not there. He was glad of that; for it gave him hopes she was going to respect his advice, and give up her solitary life.

He went down-stairs, and on to the lawn, to look for her. He could not see her anywhere.

At last, when he had given up looking for her, he found her in his study, crouched in a corner.

She rose at sight of him, and stood before him. "Harrington," said she, in rather a commanding way, "Aunt Maitland is ill, and I wish to go to her."

Harrington stared at her, with surprise. "You are not well enough yourself."

"Quite well enough in body to go anywhere."

"Well, but" — said Harrington — she caught him up impatiently. "Surely you cannot object to my visiting Aunt Maitland. She is dangerously ill. I had a second letter, this morning — see." And she held him out a letter.

Harrington was in a difficulty. He felt sure this was not her real motive; but he did not like to say so, harshly, to an unhappy girl. He took a moderate course. "Not just now, dear," said he.

"What! am I to wait till she dies?" cried Zoe, getting agitated at his opposition.

"Be reasonable, dear. You know you are the mistress of this house. Do not desert me just now. Consider the position. It is a very chattering county. I entertain Mademoiselle Klosking; I could not do otherwise when she was nearly killed in my hall. But for my sister to go away whilst she remains here, would have a bad effect."

"It is too late to think of that, Harrington. The mischief is done; and you must plead your eccentricity. Why should I bear the blame? I never approved of it."

"You would have sent her to an inn, eh?"

"No; but Miss Gale offered to take her."

"Then I am to understand that you propose to mark your reprobation of my conduct by leaving my house."

"What! publicly? Oh, no. You may say to yourself that your sister could not bear to stay under the same roof with Mr. Severne's mistress. But this chattering county shall never know my mind. My aunt is dangerously ill. She lives but thirty miles off. She is a fit object of pity. She is — a — respectable — lady; she is all alone: no female physician; no flirt, turned sister of charity; no woman-hater — to fetch and carry for her. And so I shall go to her. I am your sister, not your slave. If you grudge me your horses, I will go on foot."

Vizard was white with wrath, but governed himself like a man. "Go on, young lady," said he; "go on. Jeer, and taunt, and wound the best brother any young madwoman ever had. But don't think I'll answer you as you deserve, I'm too cunning. If I was to say an unkind word to you, I should suffer the tortures of the damned. So go on."

"No, no. Forgive me, Harrington. It is your opposition that drives me wild. Oh, have pity on me. I shall go mad, if I stay here. Do, pray, pray, pray let me go to Aunt Maitland."

"You shall go, Zoe. But I tell you plainly, this step will be a blow to our affection — the first."

Zoe cried at that. But, as she did not withdraw her request, Harrington told her, with cold civility, that she must be good enough to be ready directly after breakfast to-morrow, and take as little luggage as she could with convenience to herself.

Horses were sent on that night to the "Fox," an inn half-way between Vizard Court and Miss Maitland's place.

In the morning, a light barouche, with a sling for luggage, came round, and Zoe was soon seated in it. Then, to her surprise, Harrington came out, and sat beside her.

She was pleased at this, and said, "What! are you going with me, dear; all that way?"

"Yes, to save appearances," said he: and took out a newspaper to read.

This froze Zoe, and she retired within herself.

It was a fine fresh morning; the coachman drove fast; the air fanned her cheek; the motion was enlivening; the horses' hoofs rang quick and clear upon the road. Fresh objects met the eye every moment. Her heart was as sad and aching as before; but there arose a faint encouraging sense that some day she might be better, or things might take some turn.

When they had rolled about ten miles, she said in a low voice, "Harrington."

"Well?"

"You were right. Cooping one's self up is the way to go mad."

"Of course it is."

"I feel a little better now; a very little."

"I am glad of it."

But he was not hearty: and she said no more.

He was extremely attentive to her all the journey, and, indeed, had never been half so polite to her.

This, however, led to a result he did not intend nor anticipate. Zoe, being now cool, fell into a state of compunction and dismay. She saw his affection for her leaving him, and stiff politeness coming instead.

She leaned forward, put her hands on his knees, and looked, all scared, in his face. "Harrington!" she cried, "I was wrong. What is Aunt Maitland to me? You are my all. Bid him turn the horses' heads and go home."

"Why, we are only six miles from the place."

"What does that matter? We shall have had a good long drive together, and I will dine with you after it;

and I will ride or drive with you every day, if you will let me."

Vizard could not help smiling. He was disarmed. "You impulsive young monkey," said he, "I shall do nothing of the kind. In the first place, I couldn't turn back from anything; I'm only a man. In the next place, I have been thinking it over as you have; and this is a good move of ours, though I was a little mortified at first. Occupation is the best cure of love; and this old lady will find you plenty. Besides, nursing improves the character. Look at that frivolous girl, Fanny, how she has come out. And you know, Zoe, if you get sick of it in a day or two, you have only to write to me, and I will send for you directly. A short absence, with so reasonable a motive as visiting a sick aunt, will provoke no comments. It is all for the best."

This set Zoe at her ease; and brother and sister resumed their usual manners.

They reached Miss Maitland's house, and were admitted to her sick-room. She was really very ill; and thanked them so pathetically for coming to visit a poor lone old woman, that now they were both glad they had come.

Zoe entered on her functions with an alacrity that surprised herself; and Vizard drove away. But he did not drive straight home. He had started from Vizard Court with other views. He had telegraphed Lord Uxmoor, the night before, and now drove to his place, which was only five miles distant. He found him at home, and soon told him his errand. "Do you remember meeting a young fellow at my house, called Severne?"

"I do," said Lord Uxmoor, dryly enough.

"Well, he has turned out an impostor."

Uxmoor's eye flashed. He had always suspected Severne of being his rival, and a main cause of his

defeat. "An impostor?" said he: "that is rather a strong word. Certainly I never heard a gentleman tell such a falsehood as he volunteered about — what's the fellow's name? — a detective."

"Oh, Poikilus! That is nothing. That was one of his white lies. He is a villain all round, and a forger by way of climax."

"A forger! What! a criminal?"

"Rather. Here are his drafts. The drawer and acceptor do not exist. The whole thing was written by Edward Severne, whose indorsement figures on the bill. He got me to cash these bills. I deposit them with you, and I ask you for a warrant to commit him, if he should come this way."

"Is that likely?"

"Not at all; it is a hundred to one he never shows his nose again in Barfordshire. When he was found out, he bolted, and left his very clothes in my house. I packed them off to the 'Swan' at Taddington. He has never been heard of since; and I have warned him, by advertisement, that he will be arrested if ever he sets foot in Barfordshire."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then — I am not going to throw away a chance. The beggar had the impudence to spoon on my sister Zoe. That was my fault, not hers. He was an old college acquaintance, and I gave him opportunities: I deserve to be horsewhipped. However, I am not going to commit the same blunder twice. My sister is in your neighborhood for a few days."

"Ah!"

"And perhaps you will be good enough to keep your eye on her."

"I feel much honored by such a commission. But you have not told me where Miss Vizard is."

"With her aunt, Miss Maitland, at Somerville Villa, near Bagley. *Apropos,* I had better tell you what she is there for, or your good dowager will be asking her to parties. She has come to nurse her Aunt Maitland. The old lady is seriously ill, and all our young coquettes are going in for nursing. We have a sick lady at our house, I am sorry to say, and she is nursed like a queen, by Doctress Gale, and ex-Flirt Fanny Dover. Now is fulfilled the saying that was said, —

'O woman! in our hours of ease,' —

I spare you the rest, and simply remark that our Zoe, fired by the example of those two ladies, has devoted herself to nursing Aunt Maitland. It is very good of her, but experience tells me she will very soon find it extremely trying; and, as she is a very pretty girl, and, therefore, a fit subject of male charity, you might pay her a visit now and then, and show her that this best of all possible worlds contains young gentlemen of distinction, with long and glossy beards, as well as peevish old women, who are extra selfish and tyrannical when they happen to be sick."

Uxmoor positively radiated as this programme was unfolded to him. Vizard observed that, and chuckled inwardly.

He then handed him the forged acceptances.

Lord Uxmoor begged him to write down the facts on paper, and also his application for the warrant. He did so. Lord Uxmoor locked the paper up, and the friends parted: Vizard drove off, easy in his mind, and congratulating himself, not unreasonably, on his little combination, by means of which he had provided his sister with a watch-dog, a companion, and an honorable lover, all in one.

Uxmoor put on his hat, and strode forth into his own

grounds, with his heart beating high at this strange turn of things in favor of his love.

Neither foresaw the strange combinations which were to arise out of an event that appeared so simple and one-sided.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

Ina Klosking's cure was retarded by the state of her mind. The excitement and sharp agony her physician had feared, died away as the fever of the brain subsided; but then there settled down a grim, listless lethargy, which obstructed her return to health and vigor. Once she said to Rhoda Gale, "But I have nothing to get well for." As a rule, she did not speak her mind, but thought a great deal. She often asked after Zoe; and her nurses could see that her one languid anxiety was somehow connected with that lady. Yet she did not seem hostile to her now, nor jealous. It was hard to understand her; she was reserved, and very deep.

The first relief to the deadly languor of her mind came to her from music. That was no great wonder; but, strange to say, the music that did her good was neither old enough to be revered, nor new enough to be fashionable. It was English music, too, and *passée* music. She came across a collection of Anglican anthems and services, — written, most of it, towards the end of the last century and the beginning of this. The composers' names promised little: they were Blow, Nares, Greene, Kent, King, Jackson, etc. The words and the music of these compositions seemed to suit one another; and, as they were all quite new to her, she went through them almost eagerly, and hummed several of the strains, and, with her white but now thin hand, beat time to others. She even sent for Vizard, and said to him, "You have a treasure here. Do you know these compositions?"

He inspected his treasure. "I remember," said he,

"my mother used to sing this one, 'When the eye saw her, then it blessed her,' and parts of this one, 'Hear my prayer;' and, let me see, she used to sing this psalm, 'Praise the Lord,' by Jackson. I am ashamed to say I used to ask for 'Praise the Lord Jackson,' meaning to be funny, not devout."

"She did not choose ill," said Ina. "I thought I knew English music, yet here is a whole stream of it new to me. Is it esteemed?"

"I think it was once; but it has had its day."

"That is strange; for here are some immortal qualities. These composers had brains, and began at the right end; they selected grand and tuneful words, great and pious thoughts; they impregnated themselves with those words, and produced appropriate music. The harmonies are sometimes thin, and the writers seem scarcely to know the skilful use of discords; but they had heart and invention; they saw their way clear, before they wrote the first note; there is an inspired simplicity and fervor. If all these choice things are dead, they must have fallen upon bad interpreters."

"No doubt," said Vizard; "so please get well, and let me hear these pious strains, which my poor dear mother loved so well, interpreted worthily."

The Klosking's eyes filled. "That is a temptation," said she simply. Then she turned to Rhoda Gale. "Sweet physician, he has done me good. He has given me something to get well for."

Vizard's heart yearned. "Do not talk like that," said he buoyantly; then, in a broken voice, "Heaven forbid you should have nothing better to live for than that!"

"Sir," said she gravely, "I have nothing better to live for now than to interpret good music worthily."

There was a painful silence.

Ina broke it. She said, quite calmly, "First of all, I

wish to know how others interpret these strains your mother loved, and I have the honor to agree with her."

"Oh," said Vizard, "we will soon manage that for you. These things are not defunct; only unfashionable. Every choir in England has sung them, and can sing them, after a fashion: so, at twelve o'clock to-morrow, look out — for squalls!"

He mounted his horse, rode into the cathedral town, distant eight miles, and arranged with the organist for himself, four leading boys, and three lay clerks. He was to send a carriage in for them, after the morning service, and return them in good time for vespers.

Fanny told Ina Klosking, and she insisted on getting up.

By this time Doctress Gale had satisfied herself that a little excitement was downright good for her patient, and led to refreshing sleep. So they dressed her loosely, but very warmly, and rolled her to the window on her invalid couch, set at a high angle. It was a fine, clear day in October, keen but genial; and, after muffling her well, they opened the window.

While she sat there, propped high, and inhaling the pure air, Vizard conveyed his little choir, by another staircase, into the ante-chamber; and, under his advice, they avoided preludes, and opened in full chorus with Jackson's song of praise.

At the first burst of sacred harmony, Ina Klosking was observed to quiver all over.

They sang it rather coarsely, but correctly and boldly, and with a certain fervor. There were no operatic artifices to remind her of earth; the purity and the harmony struck her full. The great singer and sufferer lifted her clasped hands to God, and the tears flowed fast down her cheeks.

These tears were balm to that poor lacerated soul, tormented by many blows.

"O lacrymarum fons, tenero sacros
Ducèmtium ortus ex animo, quater
Felix, in imo qui scatentem
Pectore, te, pia nympha, sensit."

Rhoda Gale, who hated music like poison, crept up to her, and enfolding her delicately, laid a pair of wet eyes softly on her shoulder.

Vizard now tapped at the door, and was admitted from the music-room. He begged Ina to choose another composition from her book. She marked a service and two anthems, and handed him the volume, but begged they might not be done too soon, one after the other. That would be quite enough for one day, especially if they would be good enough to repeat the hymn of praise to conclude; "for," said she, "these are things to be digested."

Soon the boys' pure voices rose again, and those poor dead English composers, with prosaic names, found their way again to the great foreign singer's soul.

They sang an anthem, which is now especially despised by those great critics, the organists of the country — "My song shall be of mercy and judgment."

The Klosking forgave the thinness of the harmony, and many little faults in the vocal execution. The words, no doubt, went far with her, being clearly spoken. She sat meditating, with her moist eyes raised, and her face transfigured, and at the end she murmured to Vizard, with her eyes still raised, "After all, they are great and pious words, and the music has at least this crowning virtue — it means the words." Then she suddenly turned upon him and said, "There is another person in this house who needs this consolation as much as I do.

Why does she not come? But perhaps she is with the musicians."

"Whom do you mean?"

"Your sister."

"Why, she is not in the house."

Ina Klosking started at this information, and bent her eyes keenly and inquiringly on him.

"She left two days ago."

"Indeed!"

"To nurse a sick aunt."

"Indeed! Had she no other reason?"

"Not that I know of," said Vizard; but he could not help coloring a little.

The little choir now sang a service, King, in F. They sang the "Magnificat" rudely, and rather profanely, but recovered themselves in the "Dimittis."

When it was over, Ina whispered, "'To be a light to lighten the Gentiles.' That is an inspired duet. Oh, how it might be sung!"

"Of course it might," whispered Vizard; "so you have something to get well for."

"Yes, my friend — thanks to you and your sainted mother."

This, uttered in a voice which, under the healing influence of music, seemed to have regained some of its rich melody, was too much for our cynic, and he bustled off to hide his emotion, and invited the musicians to lunch.

All the servants had been listening on the stairs, and the hospitable old butler plied the boys with sparkling Moselle, which, being himself reared on mighty port, he thought a light and playful wine — just the thing for women and children. So after luncheon they sang rather wild, and the Klosking told Vizard, dryly, that would do for the present.

Then he ordered the carriage for them, and asked Mademoiselle Klosking when she would like them again.

"When *can* I?" she inquired, rather timidly.

"Every day, if you like — Sundays and all."

"I must be content with every other day."

Vizard said he would arrange it so, and was leaving her; but she begged him to stay a moment.

"She would be safer here," said she, very gravely.

Vizard was taken aback by the suddenness of this return to a topic he was simple enough to think she had abandoned. However, he said, "She is safe enough. I have taken care of that, you may be sure."

"You have done well, sir," said Ina, very gravely.

She said no more to him; but just before dinner Fanny came in, and Miss Gale went for a walk in the garden. Ina pinned Fanny directly. "Where is Miss Vizard?" said she, quietly.

Fanny colored up; but seeing in a moment that fibs would be dangerous, said, mighty carelessly, "She is at Aunt Maitland's."

"Where does *she* live, dear?"

"In a poky little place called 'Somerville Villa.'"

"Far from this?"

"Not very. It is forty miles by the railway, but not thirty by the road; and Zoe went in a barouche all the way."

Mademoiselle Klosking thought a little, and then taking Fanny Dover's hand, said to her, very sweetly, "I beg you to honor me with your confidence, and tell me something. Believe me, it is for no selfish motive I ask you; but I think Miss Vizard is in danger. She is too far from her brother, and too far from me. Mr. Vizard says she is safe. Now, can you tell me what he means? How can she be safe? Is her heart turned to stone, like mine?"

"No, indeed," said Fanny. "Yes, I will be frank with you; for I believe you are wiser than any one of us. Zoe is not safe, left to herself. Her heart is anything but stone; and Heaven knows what wild, mad thing she might be led into. But I know perfectly well what Vizard means: no, I don't like to tell it you all. It will give you pain."

"There is little hope of that. I am past pain."

"Well, then — Miss Gale will scold me."

"No, she shall not."

"Oh, I know you have got the upper hand even of her; so if you promise I shall not be scolded, I'll tell you. You see, I had my misgivings about this very thing; and as soon as Vizard came home — it was he who took her to Aunt Maitland — I asked him what precautions he had taken to hinder that man from getting hold of her again. Well, then — oh, I ought to have begun by telling you Mr. Severne forged bills to get money out of Harrington."

"Good heavens!"

"Oh, Harrington will never punish him, if he keeps his distance; but he has advertised in all the papers, warning him, that, if he sets foot in Barfordshire, he will be arrested and sent to prison."

Ina Klosking shook her head. "When a man is in love with such a woman as that, dangers could hardly deter him."

"That depends upon the man, I think. But Harrington has done better than that. He has provided her with a watch-dog, — the best of all watch-dogs, another lover. Lord Uxmoor lives near Aunt Maitland, and he adores Zoe; so Harrington has commissioned him to watch her, and cure her and all. I wish he'd cure *me* — an earl's coronet and twenty thousand a year!"

"You relieve my mind," said Ina. Then, after a

pause, "But let me ask you one question more. Why did you not tell me Miss Vizard was gone?"

"I don't know," said Fanny, coloring up. "*She* told me not."

"Who?"

"Why, the vixen in command. She orders everybody."

"And why did she forbid you?"

"Don't know."

"Yes, you do. Kiss me, dear. There, I will distress you with no more questions. Why should I? Our instincts seldom deceive us. Well, so be it; I have something more to get well for, and I will."

Fanny looked up at her inquiringly.

"Yes," said she; "the daughter of this hospitable house will never return to it whilst I am in it. Poor girl! She thinks *she* is the injured woman. So be it. I will get well — and leave it."

Fanny communicated this to Miss Gale, and all she said was, "She shall go no farther than Hillstoke, then; for I love her better than any man can love her."

Fanny did not tell Vizard; and he was downright happy, seeing the woman he loved recover, by slow degrees, her health, her strength, her color, her voice. Parting was not threatened. He did not realize that they should ever part at all. He had vague hopes that, whilst she was under his roof, opportunity might stand his friend, and she might requite his affection. All this would not bear looking into very closely: for that very reason he took particular care not to look into it very closely; but hoped all things, and was happy. In this condition he received a little shock.

A one-horse fly was driven up to the door, and a card brought in —

"Mr. Joseph Ashmead."

Vizard was always at home at Vizard Court, except to convicted bores. Mr. Ashmead was shown into his study.

Vizard knew him at a glance. The velveteen coat had yielded to tweed; but another loud tie had succeeded to the one "that fired the air at Homburg." There, too, was the wash-leather face, and other traits Vizard professed to know an actress's lover by. Yes, it was the very man, at sight of whom he had fought down his admiration of La Klosking, and declined an introduction to her. Vizard knew the lady better now. But still he was a little jealous even of her acquaintances, and thought this one unworthy of her; so he received him with stiff but guarded politeness, leaving him to open his business.

Ashmead, overawed by the avenue, the dozen gables, fourscore chimneys, etc., addressed him rather obsequiously, but with a certain honest trouble, that soon softened the bad impression caused by his appearance.

"Sir," said he, "pray excuse this intrusion of a stranger; but I am in great anxiety. It is not for myself, but for a lady, a very distinguished lady, whose interests I am charged with. It is Mademoiselle Klosking, the famous singer."

Vizard maintained a grim silence.

"You may have heard of her."

"I have."

"I almost fancy you once heard her sing — at Homburg."

"I did."

"Then I am sure you must have admired her, being a gentleman of taste. Well, sir, it is near a fortnight since I heard from her."

"Well, sir?"

"You will say, what is that to you? But the truth is, she left me, in London, to do certain business for her, and she went down to this very place. I offered to come

with her, but she declined. To be sure, it was a delicate matter, and not at all in my way. She was to write to me, and report progress, and give me her address, that I might write to her; but nearly a fortnight has passed. I have not received a single letter. I am in real distress and anxiety. A great career awaits her in England, sir; but this silence is so mysterious, so alarming, that I begin actually to hope she has played the fool, and thrown it all up, and gone abroad with that blackguard."

"What blackguard, sir?"

Joseph drew in his horns. "I spoke too quick, sir," said he; "it is no business of mine. But these brilliant women are as mad as the rest in throwing away their affections. They prefer a blackguard to a good man. It is the rule. Excuse my plain-speaking."

"Mr. Ashmead," said Vizard, "I may be able to answer your questions about this lady; but, before I do so, it is right I should know how far you possess her confidence. To speak plainly, have you any objection to tell me what is the precise relation between you and her?"

"Certainly not, sir; I am her theatrical agent."

"Is that all?"

"Not quite. I have been a good deal about her lately, and have seen her in deep distress. I think I may almost say I am her friend, though a very humble one."

Vizard did not yet quite realize the truth, that this Bohemian had in his heart one holy spot, — his pure devotion and unsexual friendship for that great artist. Still his prejudices were disarmed, and he said, "Well, Mr. Ashmead, excuse my cross-questioning you. I will now give myself the pleasure of setting your anxieties at rest. Mademoiselle Klosking is in this house."

Ashmead stared at him, and then broke out, "In this house? Oh, Lord! how can that be?"

"It happened in a way very distressing to us all, though the result is now so delightful. Mademoiselle Klosking called here on a business, with which, perhaps, you are acquainted."

"I am, sir."

"Unfortunately, she met with an accident in my very hall — an accident that endangered her life, sir; and of course we took charge of her. She has had a zealous physician, and good nurses, and she is recovering slowly. She is quite out of danger, but still weak. I have no doubt she will be delighted to see you. Only, as we are all under the orders of her physician, and that physician is a woman, and a bit of a vixen, you must allow me to go and consult her first."

Vizard retired, leaving Joseph happy, but mystified.

He was not long alone. In less than a minute he had for companions some well-buttered sandwiches made with smoked ham, and a bottle of old madeira: the solids melted in his mouth, the liquid ran through his veins like oil charged with electricity and elixir vitæ.

By and by a female servant came for him, and ushered him into Ina Klosking's room.

She received him with undisguised affection, and he had much ado to keep from crying. She made him sit down near her in the vast embrasure of the window, and gave him a letter to read she had just written to him.

They compared notes very rapidly; but their discourse will not be given here, because so much of it would be repetition.

They were left alone to talk, and they did talk for more than an hour. The first interruption, indeed, was a recitativo with chords, followed by a verse from the leading treble.

Mr. Ashmead looked puzzled; the Klosking eyed him demurely.

Before the anthem concluded, Vizard tapped, and was admitted from the music-room. Ina smiled, and waved him to a chair. Both the men saw, by her manner, they were not to utter a sound while the music was going on. When it ceased, she said, "Do you approve that, my friend?"

"If it pleases you, madam," replied the wary Ashmead.

"It does more than please me; it does me good."

"That reconciles me to it at once."

"Oh, then you do not admire it for itself?"

"Not — very — much."

"Pray, speak plainly. I am not a tyrant, to impose my tastes."

"Well then, madam, I feel very grateful to anything that does you good: otherwise, I should say the music was — rather dreary; and the singing — very insipid."

The open struggle between Joseph's honesty and his awe of the Klosking tickled Vizard, so that he leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.

The Klosking smiled superior. "He means," said she, "that the music is not operatic, and the boys do not clasp their hands, and shake their shoulders, and sing passionately, as women do in a theatre. Heaven forbid they should! If this world is all passion, there is another which is all peace; and these boys' sweet artless tones are the nearest thing we shall get in this world to the unimpassioned voices of the angels. They are fit instruments for pious words set by composers who, however obscure they may be, were men inspired, and have written immortal strains, which, as I hear them, seem hardly of this world — they are so free from all mortal dross."

Vizard assented warmly. Ashmead asked permission

to hear another. They sang the "Magnificat" by King, in F.

"Upon my word," said Ashmead, "there is a good deal of 'go' in that."

Then they sang the "Nunc Dimittis." He said, a little dryly, there was plenty of repose in that.

"My friend," said she, "there is — to the honor of the composer. The 'Magnificat' is the bright and lofty exultation of a young woman, who has borne the Messiah, and does not foresee his sufferings, only the boon to the world and the glory to herself. But the 'Dimittis' is the very opposite. It is a gentle joy, and the world contentedly resigned by a good old man, fatigued, who has run his race, and longs to sleep after life's fever. When next you have the good fortune to hear that song, think you see the sun descending red and calm after a day of storms, and an aged Christian saying, 'Good-night,' — and you will honor poor dead King as I do. The music that truly reflects great words was never yet small music, write it who may."

"You are right, madam," said Ashmead. "When I doubted its being good music, I suppose I meant salable."

"Ah, *voilà!*" said the Klosking. Then, turning to Vizard for sympathy, "What this faithful friend understands by good music, is music that can be sold for a good deal of money."

"That is so," said Ashmead, stoutly. "I am a theatrical agent. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. You have tried it more than once, you know, but it would not work."

Ashmead amused Vizard, and he took him into his study, and had some more conversation with him. He even asked him to stay in the house; but Ashmead was shy, and there was a theatre at Taddington. So he said

he had a good deal of business to do; he had better make the "Swan" his headquarters. "I shall be at your service all the same, sir, or Mademoiselle Klosking's."

"Have a glass of madeira, Mr. Ashmead."

"Well, sir, to tell the truth, I *have* had one or two."

"Then it knows the road."

"You are very good, sir. What madeira! Is this the wine the doctors ran down a few years ago? They couldn't have tasted it."

"Well, it is like ourselves, improved by travelling. That has been twice to India."

"It will never go again, past me," said Ashmead, gayly. "My mouth is a cape it will never weather."

He went to his inn.

Before he had been there ten minutes, up rattled a smart servant in a smart dog-cart.

"Hamper — for Joseph Ashmead, Esquire."

"Anything to pay?"

"What for? — it's from Vizard Court."

And the dog-cart rattled away.

Joseph was in the hall, and witnessed this phenomenon. He said to himself, "I wish I had a vast acquaintance — ALL COUNTRY GENTLEMEN."

That afternoon, Ina Klosking insisted on walking up and down the room, supported by Mesdemoiselles Gale and Dover. The result was fatigue and sleep; that is all.

"To-morrow," said she, "I will have but one live crutch. I must and will recover my strength."

In the evening, she insisted on both ladies dining with Mr. Vizard. Here, too, she had her way.

Vizard was in very good spirits, and when the servants were gone, complimented Miss Gale on her skill.

"*Our* skill, you mean," said she. "It was you who prescribed this new medicine of the mind, the psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; and it was you who

administered the Ashmead, and he made her laugh, or nearly — and that *we* have never been able to do. She must take a few grains of Ashmead every day. The worst of it is, I am afraid we shall cure her too quickly, and then we shall lose her. But that was to be expected. I am very unfortunate in my attachments. I always was. If I fall in love with a woman, she is sure to hate me, or else die, or else fly away. I love this one to distraction, so she is sure to desert me, because she couldn't misbehave, and I won't *let* her die."

"Well," said Vizard, "you know what to do. Retard the cure. That is one of the arts of your profession."

"And so it is; but how can I, when I love her? No, we must have recourse to our benevolent tyrant again. He must get Miss Vizard back here, before my goddess is well enough to spread her wings and fly."

Vizard looked puzzled. "This," said he, "sounds like a riddle, or female logic."

"It is both," said Rhoda. "Miss Dover, give him the *mot d'énigme*. I'm off — to the patient I adore."

She vanished swiftly, and Vizard looked to Fanny for a solution. But Fanny seemed rather vexed with Miss Gale, and said nothing. Then he pressed her to explain.

She answered him, with a certain reluctance, "Mademoiselle Klosking has taken into her head that Zoe will never return to this house whilst she is in it."

"Who put that into her head, now?" said Vizard bitterly.

"Nobody, upon my honor. A woman's instinct."

"Well?"

"She is horrified at the idea of keeping your sister out of her own house, so she is getting well to go; and the strength of her will is such that she *will* get well."

"All the better; but Zoe will soon get tired of Somer-

ville Villa. A little persuasion will bring her home, especially if you were to offer to take her place."

"Oh, I would do that to oblige you, Harrington, if I saw any good at the end of it. But please think twice. How can Zoe and that lady ever stay under the same roof? How can they meet at your table, and speak to each other? They are rivals."

"They are both getting cured, and neither will ever see the villain again."

"I hope not; but who can tell? Well, never mind *them*. If their eyes are not opened by this time they will get no pity from me. It is you I think of now." Then, in a hesitating way, and her cheeks mantling higher and higher with honest blushes, "You have suffered enough already from women. I know it is not my business, but it does grieve me to see you going into trouble again. What good can come of it? Her connection with that man, so recent, and so — strange. The world *will* interpret its own way. Your position in the county — every eye upon you. I see the way in — no doubt it is strewed with flowers; but I see no way out. Be brave in time, Harrington. It will not be the first time. She must be a good woman somehow, or faces, eyes, and voices, and ways, are all a lie. But if she is good, she is very unfortunate, and she will give you a sore heart for life if you don't mind. I'd clench my teeth, and shut my eyes, and let her go in time."

Vizard groaned aloud, and at that a tear or two rolled down Fanny's burning cheeks.

"You are a good little girl," said Vizard affectionately; "but I *cannot*."

He hung his head despondently, and muttered, "I see no way out either; but I yield to fate. I feared her, and fled from her. She has followed me. I can resist no more. I drift. Some men never know happiness. I

shall have had a happy fortnight, at all events. I thank you, and respect you for your advice; but I can't take it. So now I suppose you will be too much offended to oblige me."

"Oh, dear, no."

"Would you mind writing to Aunt Maitland, and saying you would like to take Zoe's place?"

"I will do it with pleasure, to oblige you. Besides, it will be a fib, and it is so long since I have told a good fib. When shall I write?"

"Oh, about the end of the week."

"Yes, that will be time enough. Miss Gale won't *let* her go till next week. Ah, after all, how nice and natural it is to be naughty! Fibs and flirtation, welcome home! This is the beauty of being good — and I shall recommend it to all my friends on this very account — you can always leave off at a moment's notice, without any trouble. Now, naughtiness sticks to you like a burr."

So, with no more ado, this new Mentor became Vizard's accomplice, and they agreed to get Zoe back before the Klosking could get strong enough to move with her physician's consent.

As the hamper of madeira was landed in the hall of the "Swan" inn, a genial voice cried, "You are in luck." Ashmead turned, and there was Poikilus peering at him from the doorway of the commercial-room.

"What is the game now?" thought Ashmead. But what he said was, "Why, I know that face. I declare, it is the gent that treated me at Homburg. Bring in the hamper, Dick." Then to Poikilus, "Have ye dined yet?"

"No. Going to dine in half an hour. Roast gosling. Just enough for two."

"We'll divide it, if you like, and I'll stand a bottle of old madeira. My old friend, Squire Vizard, has just sent it me. I'll just have a splash; dinner will be ready by then." He bustled out of the room, but said as he went, "I say, old man, open the hamper, and put two bottles just within the smile of the fire."

He then went up-stairs, and plunged his head in cold water, to clear his faculties for the encounter.

The friends sat down to dinner, and afterwards to the madeira, both gay and genial outside, but within, full of design — their object being to pump each other.

In the encounter at Homburg, Ashmead had an advantage; Poikilus thought himself unknown to Ashmead. But this time there was a change. Poikilus knew by this time that La Klosking had gone to Vizard Court. How she had known Severne was there, puzzled him a good deal, but he had ended by suspecting Ashmead in a vague way.

The parties, therefore, met on even terms. Ashmead resolved to learn what he could about Severne, and Poikilus to learn what he could about Zoe Vizard and Mademoiselle Klosking.

Ashmead opened the ball. "Been long here?"

"Just come."

"Business?"

"Yes. Want to see if there's any chance of my getting paid for that job."

"What job?"

"Why, the Homburg job. Look here — I don't know why I should have any secrets from a good fellow like you; only you must not tell anybody else."

"Oh, honor bright!"

"Well, then, I am a detective."

"Ye don't mean that?"

"I'm Poikilus."

"Good heavens! Well, I don't care. I haven't murdered anybody. Here's your health, Poikilus. I say, you could tell a tale or two."

"That I could. But I'm out of luck this time. The gentleman that employed me has mizzled; and he promised me fifty pounds. I came down here in hopes of finding him. Saw him once in this neighborhood."

"Well, you won't find him here, I don't think. You must excuse me, but your employer is a villain. He has knocked a lady down, and nearly killed her."

"You don't say that?"

"Yes, that beautiful lady, the singer, you saw in Homburg."

"What! the lady that said he should have his money?"

"The same."

"Why, he must be mad."

"No; a scoundrel, *that is all.*"

"Then she won't give him his money after that?"

"Not if I can help it. But if she likes to pay you your commission, I shall not object to that."

"You are a good fellow."

"What is more, I shall see her to-morrow, and I will put the question to her for you."

Poikilus was profuse in his thanks, and said he began to think it was his only chance. Then he had a misgiving. "I have no claim on the lady," said he; "and I am afraid I have been a bad friend to her. I did not mean it, though, and the whole affair is dark to me."

"You are not very sharp, then, for a detective," said Ashmead. "Well, shut your mouth, and open your eyes. Your Mr. Severne was the lady's lover, and preyed upon her. He left her; she was fool enough to love him still, and pined for him. He is a gambler, and was gambling by my side when Mademoiselle Klosking came in; so he cut his lucky, and left me fifty pounds to

play for him, and she put the pot on, and broke the bank. I didn't know who he was, but we found it out by his photograph. Then you came smelling after the money, and we sold you nicely, my fine detective. We made it our business to know where you wrote to: Vizard Court. She went down there, and found him just going to be married to a beautiful young lady. She collared him. He flung her down, and cut her temple open — nearly killed her. She lies ill in the house; and the other young lady is gone away broken-hearted."

"Where to?"

"How should I know? What is that to you?"

"Why, don't you see? Wherever she is, he won't be far off. He likes her best, don't he?"

"It don't follow that she likes him, now she has found him out. He had better not go after her, or he'll get a skinful of broken bones. My friend Squire Vizard is the man to make short work with him, if he caught the blackguard spooning after his sister."

"And serve him right. Still, I wish I knew where that young lady is."

"I dare say I could learn, if I made it my business."

Having brought the matter to that point, Poikilus left it, and simply made himself agreeable. He told Ashmead his experiences; and as they were, many of them, strange and dramatic, he kept him a delighted listener till midnight.

The next day Ashmead visited Mademoiselle Klosking, and found her walking up and down the room with her hand on Miss Gale's shoulder.

She withdrew into the embrasure, and had some confidential talk with him. As a matter of course, he told her about Poikilus, and that he was hunting down Severne for his money.

"Indeed!" said the Klosking. "Please tell me every word that passed between you."

He did so, as nearly as he could remember.

Mademoiselle Klosking leaned her brow upon her hand a considerable time, in thought. Then she turned on Ashmead, and said, quietly, "That Poikilus is still acting for *him*, and the one thing they desire to learn is where to find Miss Vizard, and delude her to her ruin."

"No, no!" cried Ashmead, violently; but the next moment his countenance fell. "You are wiser than I am," said he; "it may be. Confound the sneak! I'll give it him, next time I see him. Why, he must love villany for its own sake. I as good as said you would pay him his fifty pounds."

"What fifty pounds? His fifty pounds is a false hood like himself. Now, my friend, please take my instructions, my positive instructions."

"Yes, madam."

"You will not change your friendly manner; show no suspicion nor anger. If they are cunning, we must be wise; and the wise always keep their temper. You will say Miss Vizard has gone to Ireland, but to what part is only known to her brother. Tell him this, and be very free and communicative on all other subjects; for this alone has any importance now. As for me, I can easily learn where Somerville Villa is; and, in a day or two, shall send you to look after her. One thing is clear — I had better lose no time in recovering my strength. Well, my will is strong; I will lose no time. Your arm, monsieur;" and she resumed her promenade.

Ashmead, instructed as above, dined again with the detective; but out of revenge gave him but one bottle of madeira. As they sipped it, he delivered a great many words, and in the middle of them, said: "Oh, by the by,

I asked after that poor young lady. Gone to Ireland, but they didn't know what part."

After dinner, Ashmead went to the theatre. When he came back, Poikilus was gone.

So did Wisdom baffle Cunning that time.

But Cunning did not really leave the field; that very evening an aged man, in green spectacles, was inquiring about the postal arrangements to Vizard Court; and the next day he might have been seen, in a back street of Taddington, talking to the village postman, and afterwards drinking with him. It was Poikilus groping his way.

## CHAPTER XXV.

A FEW words avail to describe the sluggish waters of the Dead Sea, but what pen can portray the Indian Ocean lashed and tormented by a cyclone?

Even so, a few words have sufficed to show that Ina Klosking's heart was all benumbed and deadened; and, with the help of insult, treachery, loss of blood, brain-fever, and self-esteem rebelling against villany, had outlived its power of suffering poignant torture.

But I cannot sketch in a few words, nor paint in many, the tempest of passion in Zoe Vizard. Yet it is my duty to try and give the reader some little insight into the agony, the changes, the fury, the grief, the tempest of passion, in a virgin heart. In such a nature, the great passions of the mind often rage as fiercely, or even more so, than in older and experienced women.

Literally, Zoe Vizard loved Edward Severne one minute and hated him the next; gave him up for a traitor, and then vowed to believe nothing until she had heard his explanation; burned with ire at his silence, sickened with dismay at his silence. Then, for a while, love and faith would get the upper hand, and she would be quite calm. Why should she torment herself? An old sweetheart, abandoned long ago, had come between them; he had, unfortunately, done the woman an injury in his wild endeavor to get away from her. Well; what business had she to use force? No doubt he was ashamed, afflicted at what he had done, being a man; or was in despair, seeing that lady installed in her brother's house, and *her* story, probably a parcel of falsehoods,

listened to. Then she would have a gleam of joy; for she knew he had not written to Ina Klosking. But soon Despondency came down, like a dark cloud; for she said to herself, "He has left us both. He sees the woman he does not love will not let him have the one he does love; and so he has lost heart, and will have no more to say to either."

When her thoughts took this turn, she would cry piteously, but not for long. She would dry her eyes, and burn with wrath all round; she would still hate her rival, but call her lover a coward — a contemptible coward.

After her day of raging, and grieving, and doubting, and fearing, and hoping, and despairing, night overtook her with an exhausted body, a bleeding heart, and weeping eyes. She had been so happy — on the very brink of paradise; and now she was deserted. Her pillow was wet every night. She cried in her very sleep; and, when she woke in the morning, her body was always quivering; and in the very act of waking, came a horror and an instinctive reluctance to face the light that was to bring another day of misery.

Such is a fair, though loose, description of her condition.

The slight fillip given to her spirits by the journey did her a morsel of good; but it died away. Having to nurse Aunt Maitland did her a little good at first. But she soon relapsed into herself, and became so *distraite* that Aunt Maitland, who was all self, being an invalid, began to speak sharply to her.

On the second day of her visit to Somerville Villa, as she sat brooding at the foot of her aunt's bed, suddenly she heard horses' feet, and then a ring at the hall-door. Her heart leaped. Perhaps he had come to explain all. He might not choose to go to Vizard Court. What if he

had been watching as anxiously as herself, and had seized the first opportunity? In a moment her pale cheek rivalled carmine.

The girl brought up a card —

"Lord Uxmoor."

The color died away directly. "Say I am very sorry, but at this moment I cannot leave my aunt."

The girl stared with amazement, and took down the message.

Uxmoor rode away.

Zoe felt a moment's pleasure. No; if she could not see the right man, she would not see the wrong. That, at least, was in her power.

Nevertheless, in the course of the day, remembering Uxmoor's worth, and the pain she had already given him, she was almost sorry she had indulged herself at his expense.

Superfluous contrition! He came next day, as a matter of course. She liked him none the better for coming, but she went down-stairs to him.

He came towards her, but started back, and uttered an exclamation. "You are not well," he said, in tones of tenderness and dismay.

"Not very," she faltered, for his open, manly concern touched her.

"And you have come here to nurse this old lady? Indeed, Miss Vizard, you need nursing yourself. You know it is some time since I had the pleasure of seeing you, and the change is alarming. May I send you Dr. Atkins, my mother's physician?"

"I am much obliged to you. No."

"Oh, I forgot! You have a physician of your own sex. Why is she not looking after you?"

"Miss Gale is better employed. She is at Vizard

Court, in attendance on a far more brilliant person, Mademoiselle Klosking, a professional singer. Perhaps you know her?"

"I saw her at Homburg."

"Well, she met with an accident in our hall — a serious one; and Harrington took her in, and has placed all his resources, his lady physician and all, at her service: he is so fond of *music*."

A certain satirical bitterness peered through these words; but honest Uxmoor did not notice it. He said, "Then, I wish you would let me be your doctor, for want of a better."

"And you think *you* can cure me?" said Zoe satirically.

"It does seem presumptuous. But, at least, I could do you a little good, if you could be got to try my humble prescription."

"What is it?" said Zoe, listlessly.

"It is my mare Phillis. She is the delight of every lady who mounts her. She is thoroughbred, lively, swift, gentle, docile, amiable, perfect. Ride her on these downs an hour or two every day. I'll send her over to-morrow. May I?"

"If you like. Rosa *would* pack up my riding-habit."

"Rosa was a prophetess."

Next day came Phillis, saddled, and led by a groom on horseback; and Uxmoor soon followed on an old hunter. He lifted Zoe to her saddle, and away they rode, the groom following at a respectful distance.

When they got on the downs, they had a delightful canter; but Zoe, in her fevered state of mind, was not content with that. She kept increasing the pace, till the old hunter could no longer live with the young filly; and she galloped away from Lord Uxmoor, and made him ridiculous in the eyes of his groom.

The truth is, she wanted to get away from him.

He drew the rein, and stood stock-still. She made a circuit of a mile, and came up to him with heightened color and flashing eyes, looking beautiful.

"Well," said she, "don't you like galloping?"

"Yes; but I don't like cruelty."

"Cruelty!"

"Look at the mare's tail, how it is quivering, and her flanks panting! And no wonder. You have been over twice the Derby course, at a racing pace. Miss Vizard, a horse is not a steam-engine."

"I'll never ride her again," said Zoe. "I did not come here to be scolded. I will go home."

They walked slowly home in silence. Uxmoor hardly knew what to say to her; but at last he murmured, apologetically, "Never mind the poor mare, if you are any better for galloping her."

She waited a moment before she spoke, and then she said, "Well, yes; I am better. I'm better for my ride, and better for my scolding. Good-by." (Meaning forever.)

"Good-by," said he, in the same tone. Only he sent the mare next day, and followed her on a young thoroughbred.

"What!" said Zoe, "am I to have another trial?"

"And another after that."

So this time she would only canter very slowly, and kept stopping every now and then to inquire, satirically, if that would distress the mare.

But Uxmoor was too good-humored to quarrel for nothing. He only laughed, and said, "You are not the only lady who takes a horse for a machine."

These rides did her bodily health some permanent good; but their effect on her mind was fleeting. She was in fair spirits when she was actually bounding through the air; but she collapsed afterwards.

At first, when she used to think that Severne never came near her, and Uxmoor was so constant, she almost hated Uxmoor. So little does the wrong man profit by doing the right thing for a woman. I admit that, though not a deadly woman-hater myself.

But, by and by, she was impartially bitter against them both: the wrong man for doing the right thing, and the right man for not doing it.

As the days rolled by, and Severne did not appear, her indignation and wounded pride began to mount above her love. A beautiful woman counts upon pursuit, and thinks a man less than man, if he does not love her well enough to find her, though hid in the caves of ocean, or the labyrinths of Bermondsey.

She said to herself, "Then, he has no explanation to offer. Another woman has frightened him away from me. I have wasted my affections on a coward." Her bosom boiled with love and contempt and wounded pride; and her mind was tossed to and fro like a leaf in a storm. She began, by force of will, to give Uxmoor some encouragement; only, after it, she writhed and wept.

At last, finding herself driven to and fro like a leaf, she told Miss Maitland all, and sought counsel of her. She must have something to lean on.

The old lady was better by this time, and spoke kindly to her. She said Mr. Severne was charming, and she was not bound to give him up because another lady had past claims on him. But it appeared to her that Mr. Severne himself had deserted her. He had not written to her. Probably he knew something that had not yet transpired, and had steeled himself to the separation for good reasons. It was a decision she must accept. Let her then consider how forlorn is the condition of most deserted women compared with hers. Here was a

devoted lover, whom she esteemed, and who could offer her a high position and an honest love. If she had a mother, that mother would almost force her to engage herself at once to Lord Uxmoor. Having no mother, the best thing she could do would be to force herself, — to say some irrevocable words, and never look back. It was the lot of her sex not to marry the first love, and to be all the happier in the end for that disappointment, though at the time it always seemed eternal.

All this, spoken in a voice of singular kindness, by one who used to be so sharp, made Zoe's tears flow gently, and somewhat cooled her raging heart.

She began now to submit, and only cry at intervals, and let herself drift; and Uxmoor visited her every day, and she found it impossible not to esteem and regard him.

Nevertheless, one afternoon, just about his time, she was seized with such an aversion to his courtship, and such a revolt against the slope she seemed gliding down, that she flung on her bonnet and shawl, and darted out of the house to escape him. She said to the servant, "I am gone for a walk, if anybody calls."

Uxmoor did call, and, receiving this message, he bit his lip, sent the horse home, and walked up to the windmill, on the chance of seeing her anywhere. He had already observed she was never long in one mood; and, as he was always in the same mind, he thought perhaps he might be tolerably welcome, if he could meet her unexpected.

Meantime Zoe walked very fast to get away from the house as soon as possible, and she made a round of nearly five miles, walking through two villages, and, on her return, lost her way. However, a shepherd showed her a bridle-road, which, he told her, would soon take her to Somerville Villa, through "the small pastures;" and,

accordingly, she came into a succession of meadows not very large. They were all fenced, and gated; but the gates were only shut, not locked. This was fortunate; for they were new five-barred gates, and a lady does not like getting over these, even in solitude. Her clothes are not adapted.

There were sheep in some of these, cows in others, and the pastures wonderfully green and rich, being always well manured and fed down by cattle.

Zoe's love of color was soothed by these emerald fields, dotted with white sheep and red cows.

In the last field, before the lane that led to the village, a single beast was grazing. Zoe took no notice of him, and walked on; but he took wonderful notice of her, and stared, then gave a disagreeable snort. He took offence at her Indian shawl; and, after pawing the ground, and erecting his tail, he came straight at her, at a tearing trot, and his tail out behind him.

Zoe saw, and screamed violently, and ran for the gate ahead, which, of course, was a few yards farther from her than the gate behind. She ran for her life; but the bull, when he saw that, broke into a gallop directly, and came up fast with her. She could not escape.

At that moment a man vaulted clean over the gate, tore a pitchfork out of a heap of dung that luckily stood in the corner, and boldly confronted the raging bull, just in time; for at that moment Zoe lost heart, and crouched, screaming, in the side ditch, with her hands before her eyes.

The new-comer, rash as his conduct seemed, was country-bred, and knew what he was about: he drove a prong clean through the great cartilage of the bull's mouth, and was knocked down like a nine-pin, with the broken staff of the pitchfork in his hand; and the bull reared in the air with agony, the prong having gone clean through his

*'Uxmoor dragged by the tail*

upper lip, in two places, and fastened itself, as one fastens a pin, in that leathery but sensitive organ.

Now Uxmoor was a university athlete; he was no sooner down than up. So, when the bull came down from his rearing, and turned to massacre his assailant, he was behind him, and, seizing his tail, twisted it, and delivered a thundering blow on his backbone, and followed it up by a shower of them on his ribs. "Run to the gate, Zoe!" he roared. Whack! — whack! — whack! "Run to the gate, I tell you!" Whack! — whack! — whack! — whack! — whack!

Thus ordered, Zoe Vizard, who would not have moved of herself, being in a collapse of fear, scudded to the gate, got on the right side of it, and looked over, with two eyes like saucers. She saw a sight incredible to her. Instead of letting the bull alone, now she was safe, Uxmoor was sticking to him like a ferret. The bull ran, tossing his nose with pain, and bellowing: Uxmoor, dragged by the tail, and compelled to follow, in preposterous, giant strides, barely touching the ground with the point of his toe, pounded the creature's ribs with such blows as Zoe had never dreamed possible. They sounded like flail on wooden floor, and each blow was accompanied with a loud jubilant shout. Presently, being a five's player, and ambidexter, he shifted his hand, and the tremendous whacks resounded on the bull's left side. The bull, thus belabored, and resounding like the big drum, made a circuit of the field, but found it all too hot: he knew his way to a certain quiet farmyard; he bolted, and came bang at Zoe once more, with furious eyes and gore-distilling nostrils.

But this time she was on the right side of the gate.

Yet she drew back, in dismay, as the bull drew near: and she was right, for, in his agony and amazement, the unwieldy but sinewy brute leaped the five-barred gate,

and cleared it all but the top rail. That he burst through, as if it had been paper, and dragged Uxmoor after him, and pulled him down, and tore him some yards along the hard road on his back, and bumped his head against a stone, and so got rid of him: then pounded away down the lane, snorting, and bellowing, and bleeding; the prong still stuck through his nostrils, like a pin.

Zoe ran to Uxmoor, with looks of alarm and tender concern, and lifted his head to her tender bosom; for his clothes were torn, and his cheeks and hands bleeding. But he soon shook off his confusion, and rose without assistance.

"Have you got over your fright?" said he; "that is the question."

"Oh, yes! yes! It is only you I am alarmed for. It is much better I should be killed than you."

"Killed! I never had better fun in my life. It was glorious. I stuck to him, and hit — there, I have not had anything I could hit as hard as I wanted to, since I used to fight with my cousin Jack at Eton. Oh, Miss Vizard, it was a whirl of Elysium. But I am sorry you were frightened. Let me take you home."

"Oh yes, but not that way; that is the way the monster went!" quivered Zoe.

"Oh, he has had enough of us."

"But I have had too much of him. Take me some other road — a hundred miles round. How I tremble!"

"So you do. Take my arm. — No, putting the tips of your fingers on it is no use; take it really — you want support. Be courageous, now — we are very near home."

Zoe trembled, and cried a little, to conclude the incident, but walked bravely home on Uxmoor's arm.

In the hall at Somerville Villa, she saw him change color, and insisted on his taking some port wine.

"I shall be very glad," said he.

A decanter was brought. He filled a large tumbler and drank it off like water.

This was the first intimation he gave Zoe that he was in pain, and his nerves hard tried; nor did she indeed arrive at that conclusion until he had left her.

Of course she carried all this to Aunt Maitland. That lady was quite moved by the adventure. She sat up in bed, and listened with excitement and admiration. She descanted on Lord Uxmoor's courage and chivalry, and congratulated Zoe that such a pearl of manhood had fallen at her feet. "Why, child," said she, "surely, after this, you will not hesitate between this gentleman and a beggarly adventurer who has nothing, not even the courage of a man. Turn your back on all such rubbish, and be the queen of the county. I'd be content to die to-morrow if I could see you Countess of Uxmoor."

"You shall live and see it, dear aunt," said Zoe, kissing her.

"Well," said Miss Maitland, "if anything can cure me, that will. And really," said she, "I feel better ever since that brave fellow began to bring you to your senses."

Admiration and gratitude being now added to esteem, Zoe received Lord Uxmoor next day with a certain timidity and half-tenderness she had never shown before; and, as he was by nature a rapid wooer, he saw his chance, and stayed much longer than usual; and, at last, hazarded a hope that he might be allowed to try and win her heart.

Thereupon she began to fence, and say that love was all folly. He had her esteem and her gratitude, and it would be better for both of them to confine their sentiments within those rational bounds.

"That I cannot do," said Uxmoor; "so I must ask your leave to be ambitious. Let me try and conquer your affection."

"As you conquered the bull?"

"Yes; only not so rudely, nor so quickly, I'll be bound."

"Well, I don't know why I should object. I esteem you more than anybody in the world. You are my beau-ideal of a man. If you can *make* me love you, all the better for me. Only, I am afraid you cannot."

"May I try?"

"Yes," said Zoe, blushing carnation.

"May I come every day?"

"Twice a day, if you like."

"I think I shall succeed — in time."

"I hope you may."

Then he kissed her hand devotedly — the first time in his life — and went away on wings.

Zoe flew up to her Aunt Maitland, flushed and agitated. "Aunt, I'm as good as engaged to him. I have said such unguarded things. I'm sure *he* will understand it that I consent to receive his addresses as my lover. Not that I really said so."

"I hope," said Aunt Maitland, "that you have committed yourself somehow or other, and cannot go back."

"I think I have. Yes; it is all over. I cannot go back now."

Then she burst out crying. Then she was near choking, and had to smell her aunt's salts, while still the tears ran fast.

Miss Maitland received this with perfect composure. She looked on them as the last tears of regret given to a foolish attachment at the moment of condemning it forever. She was old, and had seen these final tears shed by more than one loving woman, just before entering on her day of sunshine.

And now Zoe must be alone, and vent her swelling heart. She tied a handkerchief round her head, and

darted into the garden. She went round and round it, with fleet foot and beating pulses.

The sun began to decline, and a cold wind to warn her in. She came, for the last time, to a certain turn of the gravel walk, where there was a little iron gate leading into the wooded walk from the meadows.

At that gate she found a man. She started back, and leaned against the nearest tree, with her hands behind her.

It was Edward Severne — all in black, and pale as death; but not paler than her own face turned in a moment.

Indeed, they looked at each other like two ghosts.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

Zoe was the first to speak, or rather to gasp. "Why do you come here?"

"Because *you* are here."

"And how dare you come where I am? — now your falsehood is found out and flung into my very face!"

"I have never been false to you. At this moment I suffer for my fidelity."

"*You* suffer? I am glad of it. How?"

"In many ways: but they are all light compared with my fear of losing your love."

"I will listen to no idle words," said Zoe, sternly. "A lady claimed you before my face: why did you not stand firm, like a man, and say, 'You have no claim on me now; I have a right to love another, and I do'? Why did you fly? — because you were guilty."

"No," said he doggedly. "Surprised and confounded; but not guilty. Fool! — idiot! — that I was. I lost my head entirely. Yes, it is hopeless. You *must* despise me. You have a right to despise me."

"Don't tell me," said Zoe: "you never lose your head. You are always self-possessed and artful. Would to heaven I had never seen you!" She was violent.

He gave her time. "Zoe," said he, after a while, "if I had not lost my head, should I have ill-treated a lady, and nearly killed her?"

"Ah!" said Zoe, sharply, "that is what you have been suffering from, — remorse. And well you may. You ought to go back to her, and ask her pardon on your knees. Indeed, it is all you have left to do now."

"I know I ought."

"Then do what you ought. Good-by."

"I cannot. I hate her."

"What! because you have broken her heart, and nearly killed her?"

"No: but because she has come between me and the only woman I ever really loved, or ever can."

"She would not have done that if you had not given her the right. I see her now; she looked justice, and you looked guilt. Words are idle, when I can see her face before me still. No woman could look like that who was in the wrong. But you — guilt made you a coward: you were false to her, and false to me; and so you ran away from us both. You would have talked either of us over, alone; but we were together: so you ran away. You have found me alone now, so you are brave again: but it is too late. I am undeceived. I decline to rob Mademoiselle Klosking of her lover; so good-by."

And this time she was really going, but he stopped her. "At least don't go with a falsehood on your lips," said he, coldly.

"A falsehood! — Me!"

"Yes, it is a falsehood. How can you pretend I left that lady for you, when you know my connection with her had entirely ceased ten months before I ever saw your face?"

This staggered Zoe a moment; so did the heat and sense of injustice he threw into his voice.

"I forgot that," said she, naïvely; then, recovering herself, "you may have parted with her; but it does not follow that she consented. Fickle men desert constant women. It is done every day."

"You are mistaken again," said he. "When I first saw you, I had ceased to think of Mademoiselle Klosk-

ing; but it was not so when I first left her. I did not desert her; I tore myself from her. I had a great affection for her."

"You dare to tell me that. Well, at all events, it is the truth. Why did you leave her, then?"

"Out of self-respect. I was poor — she was rich, and admired. Men sent her bouquets, and bracelets, and flattered her behind the scenes, and I was lowered in my own eyes; so I left her. I was unhappy for a time; but I had my pride to support me, and the wound was healed long before I knew what it was to love, really to love."

There was nothing here that Zoe could contradict. She kept silence, and was mystified.

Then she attacked him on another quarter. "Have you written to her, since you behaved like a ruffian to her?

"No; and I never will, come what may. It is wicked of me; but I hate her. I am compelled to esteem her; but I hate her."

Zoe could quite understand that; but in spite of that she said, "Of course you do. Men always hate those they have used ill. Why did you not write to *me?* Had a mind to be impartial, I suppose?"

"I had reason to believe it would have been intercepted."

"For shame! Vizard is incapable of such a thing."

"Ah, you don't know how he is changed. He looks on me as a mad dog. Consider, Zoe: do pray take the real key to it all. He is in love with Mademoiselle Klosking, madly in love with her: and I have been so unfortunate as to injure her; nearly to kill her. I dare say he thinks it is on your account he hates me; but men deceive themselves. It is for *her* he hates me."

"Oh!"

"Ay. Think, for a moment, and you will see it is. *You* are not in his confidence. I am sure he has never told *you* that he ordered his keepers to shoot me down if I came about the house at night."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Zoe.

"Do you know he has raised the country against me, and has warrants out against me for forgery, because I was taken in by a rogue who gave me bills with sham names on them, and I got Vizard to cash them? As soon as we found out how I had been tricked, my uncle and I offered at once to pay him back his money. But no! he prefers to keep the bills, as a weapon."

Zoe began to be puzzled a little. But she said, "You have been a long time discovering all these grievances. Why have you held no communication all this time?"

"Because you were inaccessible. Does not your own heart tell you that I have been all these weeks trying to communicate, and unable? Why, I came three times under your window, at night, and you never, never would look out."

"I did look out ever so often."

"If I had been you I should have looked ten thousand times. I only left off coming when I heard the keepers were ordered to shoot me down. Not that I should have cared much; for I am desperate. But I had just sense enough left to see that, if my dead body had been brought bleeding into your hall some night, none of you would ever have been happy again. Your eyes would have been opened, all of you. Well, Zoe, you left Vizard Court — that I learned; but it was only this morning I could find out where you were gone: and you see I am here — with a price upon my head. Please read Vizard's advertisements."

She took them, and read them. A hot flush mounted to her cheek.

"You see," said he, "I am to be imprisoned if I set my foot in Barfordshire. Well, it will be false imprisonment, and Mademoiselle Klosking's lover will smart for it. At all events, I shall take no orders but from you. You have been deceived by appearances. I shall do all I can to undeceive you; and, if I cannot, there will be no need to imprison me for a deceit of which I was the victim, nor to shoot me like a dog for loving *you*. I will take my broken heart quietly away, and leave Barfordshire, and England, and the world, for aught I care."

Then he cried; and that made her cry directly.

"Ah!" she sighed, "we are unfortunate. Appearances are so deceitful. I see I have judged too hastily, and listened too little to my own heart, that always made excuses. But it is too late now."

"Why too late?"

"It is."

"But why?"

"It all looked so ugly, and you were silent. We are unfortunate. My brother would never let us marry; and besides — Oh, why did you not come before?"

"I might as well say, why did you not look out of your window? You could have done it without risking your life, as I did. Or why did you not advertise? You might have invited an explanation from 'E. S.,' under cover to so-and-so."

"Ladies never think of such things. You know that very well."

"Oh, I don't complain; but I do say that those who love should not be ready to reproach; they should put a generous construction. You might have known, and you ought to have known, that I was struggling to find you, and torn with anguish at my impotence."

"No, no. I am so young and inexperienced, and all

my friends against you. It is they who have parted us."

"How can they part us, if you love me still as I love you?"

"Because for the last fortnight I have not loved you, but hated you, and doubted you, and thought my only chance of happiness was to imitate your indifference: and whilst I was thinking so, another person has come forward — one whom I have always esteemed; and now, in my pity and despair, I have given him hopes." She hid her burning face in her hands.

"I see; you are false to me, and therefore you have suspected me of being false to you."

At that she raised her head high directly. "Edward, you are unjust. Look in my face, and you may see what I have suffered, before I could bring myself to condemn you."

"What! your paleness, that dark rim under your lovely eyes — am I the cause?"

"Indeed you are. But I forgive you. You are sadly pale and worn too. Oh, how unfortunate we are!"

"Do not cry, dearest," said he; "do not despair. Be calm, and let me know the worst. I will not reproach you, though you have reproached me. I love you as no woman can love. Come, tell me."

"Then the truth is, Lord Uxmoor has renewed his attention to me."

"Ah!"

"He has been here every day."

Severne groaned.

"Aunt Maitland was on his side, and spoke so kindly to me; and he saved my life from a furious bull. He is brave, noble, good, and he loves me. I have committed myself. I cannot draw back with honor."

"But from me you can, because I am poor, and hated,

and have no title. If you are committed to him, you are engaged to me."

"I am; so now I can go neither way. If I had poison I would take it this moment, and end all."

"For God's sake, don't talk so! I am sure you exaggerate. You cannot, in these few days, have pledged your faith to another. Let me see your finger. Ah! there's my ring on it still: bless you, my own darling Zoe, bless you!" and he covered her hand with kisses, and bedewed it with his ever-ready tears.

The girl began to melt, and all power to ooze out of her, mind and body. She sighed deeply, and said, "What can I do — I don't say with honor and credit, but with decency — what *can* I do?"

"Tell me, first, what you have said to him that you consider so compromising."

Zoe, with many sighs, replied, "I believe — I said — I was unhappy. And so I was. And I owned — that I admired — and esteemed him. And so I do. And then, of course, he wanted more, and I could not give more; and he asked might he try and *make* me love him; and — I said — I am afraid I said — he might, if he could."

"And a very proper answer too."

"Ah! but I said he might come every day. It is idle to deceive ourselves: I have encouraged his addresses. I can do nothing now with credit, but die, or go into a convent."

"When did he say this?"

"This very day."

"Then he has never acted on it."

"No, but he will. He will be here to-morrow, for certain."

"Then your course is plain. You must choose to-night between him and me. You must dismiss him by letter, or me upon the spot. I have not much fortune to offer

you, and no coronet; but I love you, and you have seen me reject a lovely and accomplished woman, whom I esteem as much as you do this lord. Reject him! Why, you have seen me fling her away from me like a dog, sooner than leave you in a moment's doubt of my love. If you cannot write a civil note declining an earl for me, your love is not worthy of mine, and I will begone with my love. I will not take it to Mademoiselle Klosking, though I esteem her as you do this lord; but, at all events, I will take it away from you, and leave you my curse instead, for a false, fickle girl, that could not wait one little month, but must fall, with her engaged ring on her finger, into another man's arms. Oh, Zoe! Zoe! who could have believed this of you?"

"Don't reproach *me*. I won't bear it," she cried, wildly.

"I hope not to have to reproach you," said he, firmly; "I cannot conceive your hesitating."

"I am worn out. Love has been too great a torment. Oh, if I could find peace!"

Again her tears flowed.

He put on a sympathizing air. "You shall have peace. Dismiss *him* as I tell you, and he will trouble you no more; shake hands with me, and say you prefer *him*, and I will trouble you no more. But with two lovers, peace is out of the question, and so is self-respect. I know I could not vacillate between you and Mademoiselle Klosking or any other woman."

"Ah, Edward, if I do this, you ought to love me very dearly!"

"I shall. Better than ever — if possible."

"And never make me jealous again."

"I never shall, dearest. Our troubles are over."

"Edward, I have been very unhappy. I could not bear these doubts again."

"You shall never be unhappy again."

"I must do what you require, I suppose. That is how it always ends; oh dear! oh dear!"

"Zoe, it must be done; you know it must."

"I warn you I shall do it as kindly as I can."

"Of course you will; you ought to."

"I must go in now; I feel very cold."

"How soon to-morrow will you meet me here?"

"When you please," said she, languidly.

"At ten o'clock?"

"Yes."

Then there was a tender parting, and Zoe went slowly in. She went to her own room, just to think it all over alone. She caught sight of her face in the glass. Her cheeks had regained color, and her eyes were bright as stars. She stopped and looked at herself. "There now," said she, "and I seem to myself to live again. I was mad to think I could ever love any man but him. He is my darling, my idol."

There was no late dinner at Somerville Villa. Indeed, ladies, left to themselves, seldom dine late. Nature is strong in them, and they are hungriest when the sun is high. At seven o'clock, Zoe Vizard was seated at her desk trying to write to Lord Uxmoor. She sighed, she moaned, she began, and dropped the pen and hid her face. She became almost wild; and in that state she at last dashed off what follows: —

DEAR LORD UXMOOR, — For pity's sake forgive the mad words I said to you to-day. It is impossible. I can do no more than admire and esteem you. My heart is gone from me forever. Pray forgive me, though I do not deserve it; and never see me nor look at me again. I ask pardon for my vacillation. It has been disgraceful; but it has ended, and I was under a great error, which I cannot explain to you, when I led you to believe I had a heart to give you. My eyes are opened.

Our paths lie asunder. Pray, pray, forgive me, if it is possible. I will never forgive myself, nor cease to bless and revere you, whom I have used so ill.

ZOE VIZARD.

That day, Uxmoor dined alone with his mother for a wonder, and he told her how Miss Vizard had come round; he told her also about the bull, but so vilely that she hardly comprehended he had been in any danger: these encounters are rarely described to the life, except by us who avoid them — except on paper.

Lady Uxmoor was much pleased. She was a proud, politic lady, and this was a judicious union of two powerful houses in the county, and one that would almost command the elections. But, above all, she knew her son's heart was in the match, and she gave him a mother's sympathy.

As she retired, she kissed him, and said, "When you are quite sure of the prize, tell me, and I will call upon her."

Being alone, Lord Uxmoor lighted a cigar, and smoked it in measureless content. The servant brought him a note on a salver. It had come by hand. Uxmoor opened it, and read every word straight through, down to "Zoe Vizard;" read it, and sat petrified.

He read it again. He felt a sort of sickness come over him. He swallowed a tumbler of port, a wine he rarely touched: but he felt worse now than after the bull-fight. This done, he rose and stalked like a wounded lion into the drawing-room, which was on the same floor, and laid the letter before his mother.

"You are a woman, too," said he, a little helplessly. "Tell me — what on earth does this mean?"

The dowager read it slowly and keenly, and said, "It means — another man."

"Ah!" said Uxmoor, with a sort of snarl.

"Have you seen any one about her?"

"No; not lately. At Vizard Court there was; but that is all over now, I conclude. It was a Mr. Severne, an adventurer, a fellow that was caught out in a lie before us all. Vizard tells me a lady came and claimed him before Miss Vizard, and he ran away."

"An unworthy attachment, in short?"

"Very unworthy, if it was an attachment at all."

"Was he at Vizard Court when she declined your hand?"

"Yes."

"Did he remain, after you went?"

"I suppose so. Yes, he must have."

"Then the whole thing is clear: that man has come forward again unexpectedly, or written, and she dismisses you. My darling, there is but one thing for you to do. Leave her, and thank her for telling you in time. A less honorable fool would have hidden it, and then we might have had a Countess of Uxmoor in the divorce court some day or other."

"I had better go abroad," said Uxmoor, with a groan. "This country is poisoned for me."

"Go, by all means. Let Janneway pack up your things to-morrow."

"I should like to kill that fellow first."

"You will not even waste a thought on him, if you are my son."

"You are right, mother. What am I to say to her?"

"Not a word."

"What! not answer her letter? It is humble enough, I am sure — poor soul! Mother, I am wretched, but I am not bitter, and my rival will revenge me."

"Uxmoor, your going abroad is the only answer she shall have. The wisest man, in these matters, who ever

lived, has left a rule of conduct to every well-born man —a rule which, believe me, is wisdom itself:—

> 'Le bruit est pour le fat, la plainte est pour le sot;
> L'honnête homme trompé s'éloigne, et ne dit mot.'

"You will make a tour, and not say a word to Miss Vizard, good, bad, or indifferent. I insist upon that."

"Very well. Thank you, dear mother: you guide me, and don't let me make a fool of myself; for I am terribly cut up. You will be the only Countess of Uxmoor in my day."

Then he kneeled at her feet, and she kissed his head, and cried over him; but her tears only made this proud lady stronger.

Next day he started on his travels.

Now, but for Zoe, he would on no account have left England just then: for he was going to build model cottages in his own village, upon designs of his own, each with a little plot, and a public warehouse or granary, with divisions for their potatoes and apples, etc. However, he turned this over in his mind while he was packing; he placed certain plans and papers in his despatch-box, and took his ticket to Taddington, instead of going at once to London. From Taddington he drove over to Hillstoke, and asked for Miss Gale. They told him she was fixed at Vizard Court. That vexed him; he did not want to meet Vizard. He thought it the part of a Jerry Sneak, to go and howl to a brother against his sister. Yet, if Vizard questioned him, how could he conceal there was something wrong? However, he went down to Vizard Court; but said to the servant who opened the door, "I am rather in a hurry, sir: do you think that you could procure me a few minutes with Miss Gale? You need not trouble Mr. Vizard."

"Yes, my laud. Certainly, my laud. Please step in the morning-room, my laud. Mr. Vizard is out."

That was fortunate, and Miss Gale came down to him directly.

Fanny took that opportunity to chatter and tell Mademoiselle Klosking all about Lord Uxmoor and his passion for Zoe. "And he will have her, too," said she, boldly.

Lord Uxmoor told Miss Gale he had called upon business. He was obliged to leave home for a time, and wished to place his projects under the care of a person who could really sympathize with them, and make additions to them, if necessary. "Men," said he, "are always making oversights in matters of domestic comfort: besides, you are full of ideas. I want you to be viceroy with full power, and act just as you would if the village belonged to you."

Rhoda colored high at the compliment.

"Wells, cows, granary, real education — what you like," said he. "I know your mind. Begin abolishing the lower orders in the only way they can be got rid of; by raising them in comfort, cleanliness, decency, and knowledge. Then I shall not be missed. I'm going abroad."

"Going abroad?"

"Yes. Here are my plans: alter them for the better if you can. All the work to be done by the villagers. Weekly wages. We buy materials. They will be more reconciled to improved dwellings when they build them themselves. Here are the addresses of the people who will furnish money. It will entail travelling; but my people will always meet you at the station, if you telegraph from Taddington. You accept? A thousand thanks. I am afraid I must be off."

She went into the hall with him, half bewildered, and only at the door found time to ask after Zoe Vizard.

"A little better, I think, than when she came."

"Does she know you are going abroad?"

"No; I don't think she does, yet. It was settled all in a hurry."

He escaped further questioning by hurrying away.

Miss Gale was still looking after him, when Ina Klosking came down, dressed for a walk, and leaning lightly on Miss Dover's arm. This was by previous consent of Miss Gale.

"Well, dear," said Fanny, "what did he say to you?"

"Something that has surprised and puzzled me very much." She then related the whole conversation, with her usual precision.

Ina Klosking observed quietly to Fanny that this did not look like successful wooing.

"I don't know that," said Fanny, stoutly. "Oh, Miss Gale, did you not ask him about her?"

"Certainly I did; and he said she was better than when she first came."

"There!" said Fanny, triumphantly.

Miss Gale gave her a little pinch, and she dropped the subject.

Vizard returned, and found Mademoiselle Klosking walking on his gravel. He offered her his arm, and was a happy man, parading her very slowly, and supporting her steps, and purring his congratulations into her ear. "Suppose I were to invite you to dinner, what would you say?"

"I think I should say 'To-morrow.'"

"And a very good answer, too. To-morrow shall be a *fête*."

"You spoil me."

"That is impossible."

It was strange to see them together; he so happy, she so apathetic, yet gracious.

Next morning came a bit of human nature, a letter

from Zoe to Fanny, almost entirely occupied with praises of Lord Uxmoor. She told the bull story better than I have — if possible — and, in short, made Uxmoor a hero of romance.

Fanny carried this in triumph to the other ladies, and read it out. "There!" said she. "Didn't I tell you?"

Rhoda read the letter, and owned herself puzzled. "I am not, then," said Fanny: "they are engaged — over the bull; like Europa and I forget who, — and so he is not afraid to go abroad now. That is just like the men. They cool directly the chase is over."

Now the truth was that Zoe was trying to soothe her conscience with eloquent praises of the man she had dismissed, and felt guilty.

Ina Klosking said little. She was puzzled too at first. She asked to see Zoe's handwriting. The letter was handed to her. She studied the characters. "It is a good hand," she said — "nothing mean there." And she gave it back.

But, with a glance she had read the address, and learned that the post town was Bagley.

All that day, at intervals, she brought her powerful understanding to bear on the paradox; and, though she had not the facts and the clew I have given the reader, she came near the truth in an essential matter. She satisfied herself that Lord Uxmoor was not engaged to Zoe Vizard. Clearly, if so, he would not leave England for months. She resolved to know more; and just before dinner she wrote a line to Ashmead, and requested him to call on her immediately.

That day she dined with Vizard and the ladies. She sat at Vizard's right hand, and he told her how proud and happy he was to see her there.

She blushed faintly, but made no reply.

She retired soon after dinner.

All next day she expected Ashmead.

He did not come.

She dined with Vizard next day, and retired to the drawing-room. The piano was opened, and she played one or two exquisite things, and afterwards tried her voice, but only in scales, and somewhat timidly, for Miss Gale warned her she might lose it, or spoil it, if she strained the vocal chord while her whole system was weak.

Next day Ashmead came with apologies. He had spent a day in the cathedral town on business. He did not tell her how he had spent that day, going about puffing her as the greatest singer of sacred music in the world, and paving the way for her engagement at the next festival.

Yet the single-hearted Joseph had really raised that commercial superstructure upon the sentiments she had uttered on his first visit to Vizard Court.

Ina now held a private conference with him. "I think," said she, "I have heard you say you were once an actor."

"I was, madam, and a very good one too."

"*Cela va sans dire.* I never knew one that was not. At all events, you can disguise yourself."

"Anything, madam, from Grandfather Whitehead to a boy in a pinafore. Famous for my make-ups."

"I wish you to watch a certain house, and not be recognized by a person who knows you."

"Well, madam, nothing is *infra dig.* if done for you: nothing is distasteful if done for you."

"Thank you, my friend. I have thought it well to put my instructions on paper."

"Ah, that is the best way."

She handed him the instructions. He read them, and

his eyes sparkled. "Ah! this is a commission I undertake with pleasure, and I'll execute it with zeal."

He left her, soon after, to carry out these instructions; and that very evening he was in the wardrobe of the little theatre, rummaging out a suitable costume, and also in close conference with the wig-maker.

Next day Vizard had his mother's sables taken out and aired; and drove Mademoiselle Klosking into Taddington in an open carriage. Fanny told her they were his mother's sables, and none to compare with them in the country.

On returning, she tried her voice to the harmonium in her own ante-chamber, and found it was gaining strength — like herself.

Meantime, Zoe Vizard met Severne in the garden, and told him she had written to Lord Uxmoor, and he would never visit her again. But she did not make light of the sacrifice this time. She had sacrificed her own self-respect as well as Uxmoor's, and she was sullen and tearful.

He had to be very wary and patient, or she would have parted with him too, and fled from both of them to her brother.

Uxmoor's wounded pride would have been soothed could he have been present at the first interview of this pair. He would have seen Severne treated with a *hauteur*, and a sort of savageness, he himself was safe from, safe in her unshaken esteem.

But the world is made for those who can keep their temper, especially the female part of the world.

Sad, kind, and loving, but never irritable, Severne smoothed down, and soothed, and comforted the wounded girl; and, seeing her two or three times a day — for she was completely mistress of her time — got her entirely into his power again.

Uxmoor did not reply.

She had made her selection. Love beckoned forward. It was useless to look back.

Love was omnipotent. They both began to recover their good looks, as if by magic; and as Severne's passion, though wicked, was earnest, no poor bird was ever more completely entangled by bird-lime than Zoe was caught by Edward Severne.

Their usual place of meeting was the shrubbery attached to Somerville Villa. The trees, being young, made all the closer shade; and the gravel walk meandered, and shut them out from view.

Severne used to enter this shrubbery by a little gate leading from the meadow, and wait under the trees till Zoe came to him. Vizard's advertisements alarmed him, and he used to see the coast clear before he entered the shrubbery, and also before he left it. He was so particular in this, that, observing one day an old man doddering about with a basket, he would not go in till he had taken a look at him. He found it was an ancient, white-haired villager gathering mushrooms. The old fellow was so stiff, and his hand so trembling, that it took him about a minute to gather a single fungus.

To give a reason for coming up to him, Severne said, "How old are you, old man?"

"I be ninety, measter, next Martinmas-day."

"Only ninety?" said our Adonis, contemptuously; "you look a hundred and ninety."

He would have been less contemptuous had he known that the mushrooms were all toadstools, and the village *centenaire* was Mr. Joseph Ashmead, resuming his original arts, and playing Grandfather Whitehead on the green grass.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

Mademoiselle Klosking told Vizard the time drew near when she must leave his hospitable house.

"Say a month hence." said he.

She shook her head.

"Of course you will not stay to gratify me," said he, half sadly, half bitterly. "But you will have to stay a week or two longer *par ordonnance du médecin.*"

"My physician is reconciled to my going. We must all bow to necessity."

This was said too firmly to admit a reply.

"The old house will seem very dark again whenever you do go," said Vizard, plaintively.

"It will soon be brightened by her who is its true and lasting light," was the steady reply.

A day or two passed with nothing to record, except that Vizard hung about Ina Klosking, and became, if possible, more enamoured of her, and more unwilling to part with her.

Mr. Ashmead arrived one afternoon about three o'clock, and was more than an hour with her. They conversed very earnestly, and, when he went, Miss Gale found her agitated.

"This will not do," said she.

"It will pass, my friend," said Ina. "I will sleep."

She laid herself down, and slept three hours before dinner.

She arose refreshed, and dined with the little party; and, on retiring to the drawing-room, she invited Vizard to join them at his convenience.

He made it his convenience in ten minutes.

Then she opened the piano, played an introduction, and electrified them all by singing the leading song in "Siebel." She did not sing it so powerfully as in the theatre; she would not have done that even if she could: but still she sang it out, and nobly. It seemed a miracle to hear such singing in a room.

Vizard was in raptures.

They cooled suddenly when she reminded him what he had said, that she must stay till she could sing Siebel's song. "I keep to the letter of the contract," said she. "My friends, this is my last night at Vizard Court."

"Please try and shake that resolution," said Vizard, gravely, to Mesdemoiselles Dover and Gale.

"They cannot," said Ina. "It is my destiny. And yet," said she, after a pause, "I would not have you remember me by that flimsy thing. Let me sing you a song your mother loved; let me be remembered in this house, as a singer, by that."

Then she sang Handel's song —

"What though I trace each herb and flower
That decks the morning dew?
Did I not own Jehovah's power,
How vain were all I knew!"

She sang it with amazing purity, volume, grandeur, and power, the lustres rang and shook, the hearts were thrilled, and the very souls of the hearers ravished. She herself turned a little pale in singing it, and the tears stood in her eyes.

The song and its interpretation were so far above what passes for music, that they all felt compliments would be an impertinence. Their eyes and their long-drawn breath paid the true homage to that great master rightly interpreted — a very rare occurrence.

"Ah," said she; "that was the hand could brandish Goliath's spear."

"And this is how you reconcile us to losing you," said Vizard. "You might stay, at least, till you had gone through my poor mother's collection."

"Ah, I wish I could. But I cannot; I must not. My fate forbids it."

"'Fate' and 'destiny,'" said Vizard, "stuff and nonsense! We make our own destiny. Mine is to be eternally disappointed, and happiness snatched out of my hands."

He had no sooner made this pretty speech than he was ashamed of it, and stalked out of the room, not to say any more unwise things.

This burst of spleen alarmed Fanny Dover. "There," said she, "now you cannot go. He is very angry."

Ina Klosking said she was sorry for that; but he was too just a man to be angry with her long, the day would come when he would approve her conduct. Her lip quivered a little as she said this, and the water stood in her eyes; and this was remembered and understood, long after, both by Miss Dover and Rhoda Gale.

"When does your Royal Highness propose to start?" inquired Rhoda Gale very obsequiously, and just a little bitterly.

"To-morrow at half-past nine o'clock, dear friend," said Ina.

"Then you will not go without me. You will get the better of Mr. Vizard, because he is only a man; but I am a woman, and have a will as well as you. If you make a journey to-morrow, I go with you. Deny me, and you shan't go at all." Her eyes flashed defiance.

Ina moved one step, took Rhoda's little defiant head, and kissed her cheek. "Sweet physician and kind friend, of course you shall go with me, if you will; and be a great blessing to me."

This reconciled Miss Gale to the proceedings. She packed up a carpet-bag, and was up early, making provisions of every sort for her patient's journey: air-pillows, soft warm coverings, medicaments, stimulants, etc., in a little bag slung across her shoulders. Thus furnished and equipped in a uniform suit of gray cloth and wide-awake hat, she cut a very sprightly and commanding figure, but more like Diana than Hebe.

The Klosking came down, a pale Juno, in travelling costume; and a quarter of an hour before the time, a pair-horse fly was at the door, and Mr. Ashmead in the hall.

The ladies were both ready.

But Vizard had not appeared.

This caused an uneasy discussion.

"He must be very angry," said Fanny in a half whisper.

"I cannot go while he is," sighed La Klosking. "There is a limit even to my courage."

"Mr. Harris," said Rhoda, "would you mind telling Mr. Vizard?"

"Well, miss," said Harris softly, "I did step in and tell him. Which he told me to go to the devil, miss, a hobservation I never knew him to make before."

This was not encouraging. Yet the Klosking quietly inquired where he was.

"In there, ma'am," said Harris. "In his study."

Mademoiselle Klosking, placed between two alternatives, decided with her usual resolution. She walked immediately to the door, and tapped at it; then, scarcely waiting for an instant, opened it and walked in with seeming firmness, though her heart was beating rather high.

The people outside looked at one another. "I wonder whether he will tell *her* to go to the devil?" said Fanny, who was getting tired of being good.

"No use," said Miss Gale; "she doesn't know the road."

When La Klosking entered the study, Vizard was seated, disconsolate, with two pictures before him. His face was full of pain, and La Klosking's heart smote her. She moved towards him, hanging her head, and said, with inimitable sweetness and tenderness, "Here is a culprit come to try and appease you."

There came a time when he could hardly think of these words, and her penitent, submissive manner, with dry eyes. But just then his black dog had bitten him, and he said sullenly, "Oh, never mind me; it was always so. Your sex have always made me smart for — If flying from my house, before you are half recovered, gives you half the pleasure it gives me pain and mortification, say no more about it."

"Ah! why say it gives me pleasure? My friend, you cannot really think so."

"I don't know what to think. You ladies are all riddles."

"Then I must take you into my confidence, and, with some reluctance, I own, let you know why I leave this dear, kind roof to-day."

Vizard's generosity took the alarm. "No," he said, "I will not extort your reasons. It is a shame of me. Your bare will ought to be law in this house; and what reasons could reconcile me to losing you so suddenly? You are the joy of our eyes, the delight of our ears, the idol of all our hearts. You will leave us, and there will be darkness and gloom, instead of sunshine and song. Well, go; but you cannot soften the blow with reasons."

Mademoiselle Klosking flushed, and her bosom heaved; for this was a strong man greatly moved. With instinctive tact she saw the best way to bring him to his senses was to give him a good opening to retreat.

"Ah, monsieur," said she, "you are *trop grand seigneur.* You entertain a poor wounded singer in a chamber few princes can equal. You place everything at her disposal; such a physician and nurse as no queen can command; a choir to sing to her; royal sables to keep the wind from her, and ladies to wait on her. And, when you have brought her back to life, you say to yourself, She is a woman; she will not be thoroughly content unless we tell her she is adorable. So, out of politeness, you descend to the language of gallantry. This was not needed. I dispense with that kind of comfort. I leave your house because it is my duty, and leave it your grateful servant and true friend to my last hour."

She had opened the door, and Vizard could now escape. His obstinacy and his heart would not let him.

"Do not fence with me," said he. "Leave that to others. It is beneath *you.* If you had been content to stay, I would have been content to show my heart by halves. But, when you offer to leave me, you draw from me an avowal I can no longer restrain, and you must and shall listen to it. When I saw you on the stage at Homburg, I admired you, and loved you that very night. But I knew from experience how seldom in women outward graces go with the virtues of the soul. I distrusted my judgment. I feared you, and I fled you. But our destiny brought you here; and when I held you, pale and wounded, in my very arms, my heart seemed to go out of my bosom."

"Oh, no more! no more, pray!" cried Mademoiselle Klosking.

But the current of love was not to be stemmed. "Since that terrible hour I have been in heaven, watching your gradual and sure recovery; but you have recovered only to abandon me, and your hurry to leave me drives me to desperation. No, I cannot part with you. You must

not leave me, either this day or any day. Give me your hand, and stay here forever, and be the queen of my heart and of my house."

For some time La Klosking had lost her usual composure. Her bosom heaved tumultuously, and her hands trembled. But at this distinct proposal the whole woman changed. She drew herself up, with her pale cheek flushing, and her eyes glittering.

"What, sir?" said she. "Have you read me so ill? Do you not know I would rather be the meanest drudge that goes on her knees and scrubs your floors, than be queen of your house, as you call it? Ah, Jesu, are all men alike, then; that he whom I have so revered, whose mother's songs I have sung to him, makes me a proposal dishonorable to me and to himself!"

"Dishonorable!" cried Vizard. "Why, what can any man offer to any woman more honorable than I offer you? I offer you my heart and my hand, and I say, Do not go, my darling. Stay here forever, and be my queen, my goddess, my wife!"

"Your wife?" She stared wildly at him. "Your wife? Am I dreaming, or are you?"

"Neither. Do you think I can be content with less than that? Ina, I adore you."

She put her hand to her head. "I know not who is to blame for this," said she, and she trembled visibly.

"I'll take the blame," said he gayly.

Said Ina very gravely, "You, who do me the honor to offer me your name, have you asked yourself seriously what has been the nature of my relation with Edward Severne?"

"No!" cried Vizard violently; "and I do not mean to. I see you despise him now; and I have my eyes and my senses to guide me in choosing a wife. I choose you — if you will have me."

She listened, then turned her moist eyes full upon him, and said to him, "This is the greatest honor ever befell me. I cannot take it."

"Not take it?"

"No; but that is my misfortune. Do not be mortified. You have no rival in my esteem. What shall I say, my friend? — at least I may call you that; if I explain now, I shall weep much, and lose my strength. What shall I do? I think — yes, that will be best — *you shall go with me to-day.*"

"To the end of the world!"

"Something tells me you will know all, and forgive me."

"Shall I take my bag?"

"You might take an evening dress, and some linen."

"Very well. I won't keep you a moment," said he; and went up stairs with great alacrity.

She went into the hall, with her eyes bent on the ground, and was immediately pinned by Rhoda Gale, whose piercing eye, and inquisitive finger on her pulse, soon discovered that she had gone through a trying scene. "This is a bad beginning of an imprudent journey," said she; "I have a great mind to countermand the carriage."

"No, no," said Ina; "I will sleep in the railway and recover myself."

The ladies now got into the carriage; Ashmead insisted on going upon the box; and Vizard soon appeared, and took his seat opposite Miss Gale and Mademoiselle Klosking. The latter whispered her doctress: "It would be wise of me not to speak much at present." La Gale communicated this to Vizard, and they drove along in dead silence. But they were naturally curious to know where they were going; so they held some communication with their eyes. They very soon found they were going to Taddington station.

Then came a doubt — were they going up or down?

That was soon resolved.

Mr. Ashmead had hired a saloon carriage for them, with couches and conveniences.

They entered it; and Mademoiselle Klosking said to Miss Gale, "It is necessary that I should sleep."

"You shall," said Miss Gale.

While she was arranging the pillows and things, La Klosking said to Vizard, "We artists learn to sleep when we have work to do. Without it I should not be strong enough this day." She said this in a half-apologetic tone, as one anxious not to give him any shadow of offence.

She was asleep in five minutes; and Miss Gale sat watching her at first, but presently joined Vizard at the other end, and they whispered together. Said she, "What becomes of the theory that women have no strength of will? There is Mademoiselle *Je le veux* in person. When she wants to sleep, she sleeps; and look at you and me — do you know where we are going?"

"No."

"No more do I. The motive power is that personification of divine repose there. How beautiful she is with her sweet lips parted, and her white teeth peeping, and her upper and lower lashes wedded! and how graceful!"

"She is a goddess," said Vizard; "I wish I had never seen her. Mark my words, she will give me the sorest heart of all."

"I hope not," said Rhoda very seriously.

Ina slept sweetly for nearly two hours, and all that time her friends could only guess where they were going.

At last the train stopped, for the sixth time, and Ashmead opened the door.

This worthy, who was entirely in command of the expedition, collected the luggage, including Vizard's bag, and deposited it at the station. He then introduced the party to a pair-horse fly, and mounted the box.

When they stopped at Bagley, Vizard suspected where they were going.

When he saw the direction the carriage took, he knew it, and turned very grave indeed.

He even regretted that he had put himself so blindly under the control of a woman. He cast searching glances at Mademoiselle Klosking to try and discover what on earth she was going to do. But her face was as impenetrable as marble. Still she never looked less likely to do anything rash or in bad taste. Quietness was the main characteristic of her face when not rippled over by a ravishing sweetness; but he had never seen her look so great and lofty and resolute as she looked now; a little stern, too, as one who had a great duty to do, and was inflexible as iron. When truly feminine features stiffen into marble like this, beauty is indeed imperial, and worthy of epic song; it rises beyond the wing of prose.

My reader is too intelligent not to divine that she was steeling herself to a terrible interview with Zoe Vizard — terrible, mainly on account of the anguish she knew she must inflict.

But we can rarely carry out our plans exactly as we trace them — unexpected circumstances derange them or expand them; and I will so far anticipate as to say that, in this case, a most unexpected turn of events took La Klosking by surprise.

Whether she proved equal to the occasion, these pages will show very soon.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

Poikilus never left Taddington, only the "Swan." More than once he was within sight of Ashmead, unobserved. Once, indeed, that gentleman, who had a great respect for dignitaries, saluted him; for at that moment Poikilus happened to be a sleek dignitary of the Church of England. Poikilus, when quite himself, wore a mustache, and was sallow and lean as a weasel; but he shaved, and stuffed, and colored for the dean. Shovel-hat, portly walk, and green spectacles, did the rest. Grandfather Whitehead saluted. His reverence chuckled.

Poikilus kept Severne posted by letter and wire, as to many things that happened outside Vizard Court; but he could not divine the storm that was brewing inside Ina Klosking's room. Yet Severne defended himself exactly as he would have done had he known all. He and Zoe spent elysian hours, meeting twice a day in the shrubbery, and making love as if they were the only creatures in the world; but it was blind Elysium only to one of them — Severne was uneasy and alarmed the whole time.

His sagacity showed him it could not last, and there was always a creeping terror on him. Would not Uxmoor cause inquiries? Would he not be sure to tell Vizard? Would not Vizard come there to look after Zoe, or order her back to Vizard Court? Would not the Klosking get well, and interfere once more? He passed the time between heaven and hell; whenever he was not under the immediate spell of Zoe's presence, a sort of vague terror was always on him. He looked all round him wherever he went.

This terror, and his passion, which was now as violent as it was wicked, soon drove him to conceive desperate measures. But, by masterly self-government, he kept them two days to his own bosom. He felt it was too soon to raise a fresh and painful discussion with Zoe. He must let her drink unmixed delight, and get a taste for it; and then show her on what conditions alone it could be had forever.

It was on the third day after their reconciliation, she found him seated on a bench in the shrubbery, lost in thought, and looking very dejected. She was close to him before he noticed; then he sprang up, stared at her, and began to kiss her hands violently, and even her very dress.

"It is you," said he, "once more."

"Yes, dear," said Zoe, tenderly; "did you think I would not come?"

"I did not know whether you could come. I feel that my happiness cannot last long. And, Zoe dear, I have had a dream. I dreamed we were taken prisoners and carried to Vizard Court, and on the steps stood Vizard and Mademoiselle Klosking arm in arm; I believe they were man and wife. And you were taken out and led, weeping, into the house, and I was left there raging with agony. And then that lady put out her finger in a commanding way, and I was whirled away into utter darkness, and I heard you moan, and I fought, and dashed my head against the carriage, and I felt my heart burst, and my whole body filled with some cold liquid, and I went to sleep, and I heard a voice say, 'It is all over; his trouble is ended.' I was dead."

This narrative, and his deep dejection, set Zoe's tears flowing. "Poor Edward!" she sighed; "I would not survive you. But cheer up, dear; it was only a dream. We are not slaves. I am not dependent on any one. How can we be parted?"

"We shall, unless we use our opportunity, and make it impossible to part us. Zoe, do not slight my alarm and my misgivings; such warnings are prophetic. For heaven's sake, make one sacrifice more, and let us place our happiness beyond the reach of man."

"Only tell me how."

"There is but one way — marriage."

Zoe blushed high, and panted a little, but said nothing.

"Ah!" said he piteously, "I ask too much."

"How can you say that?" said Zoe. "Of course I shall marry you, dearest. What! do you think I could do what I *have* done, for anybody but my husband that is to be?"

"I was mad to think otherwise," said he; "but I am in low spirits, and full of misgivings. Oh, the comfort, the bliss, the peace of mind, the joy, if you would see our hazardous condition, and make all safe, by marrying me to-morrow!"

"To-morrow! Why, Edward, are you mad? How can we be married, so long as my brother is so prejudiced against you?"

"If we wait his consent, we are parted forever. He would forgive us after it — that is certain; but he would never consent. He is too much under the influence of his — of Mademoiselle Klosking."

"Indeed, I cannot hope he will consent beforehand," sighed Zoe; "but I have not the courage to defy him; and if I had, we could not marry all in a moment, like that. We should have to be cried in church."

"That is quite gone out, amongst ladies and gentlemen."

"Not in our family. Besides, even a special license takes time, I suppose. Oh, no, I could not be married in a clandestine, discreditable way. I am a Vizard, —

please remember that. Would you degrade the woman you honor with your choice?"

And her red cheeks and flashing eyes warned him to desist.

"God forbid!" said he. "If that is the alternative, I consent to lose her — and lose her I shall."

He then affected to dismiss the subject, and said, "Let me enjoy the hours that are left me. Much misery, or much bliss, can be condensed in a few days. I will enjoy the blessed time; and we will wait for the chapter of accidents that is sure to part us." Then he acted reckless happiness, and broke down at last.

She cried, but showed no sign of yielding. Her pride and self-respect were roused and on their defence.

The next day he came to her quietly sad. He seemed languid and listless, and to care for nothing. He was artful enough to tell her, on the information of Poikilus, that Vizard had hired the cathedral choir three times a week, to sing to his inamorata; and that he had driven her about Taddington, dressed, like a duchess, in a whole suit of sables.

At that word the girl turned pale.

He observed, and continued: "And it seems these sables are known throughout the county. There were several carriages in the town, and my informant heard a lady say they were Mrs. Vizard's sables, worth five hundred guineas, — a Russian princess gave them her."

"It is quite true," said Zoe. "His mother's sables! Is it possible?"

"They all say he is caught at last, and this is to be the next Mrs. Vizard."

"They may well say so, if he parades her in his mother's sables," said Zoe, and could not conceal her jealousy and her indignation. "I never dared so much as ask his permission to wear them," said she.

"And if you had, he would have told you the relics of a saint were not to be played with."

"That is just what he would have said, I do believe." The female heart was stung.

"Ah, well," said Severne, "I am sure I should not grudge him his happiness, if you would see things as he does, and be as brave as he is."

"Thank you," said Zoe. "Women cannot defy the world, as men do." Then, passionately, "Why do you torment me so? why do you urge me so? a poor girl, all alone, and far from advice. What on earth would you have me do?"

"Secure us against another separation, — unite us in bliss forever."

"And so I would if I could; you know I would. But it is impossible."

"No, Zoe, it is easy. There are two ways: we can reach Scotland in eight hours; and there, by a simple writing, and declaration before witnesses, we are man and wife."

"A Gretna Green marriage?"

"It is just as much a legal marriage as if a bishop married us at St. Paul's. However, we could follow it up immediately by marriage in a church, either in Scotland or the north of England. But there is another way; we can be married at Bagley, any day, before the registrar."

"Is that a marriage? a real marriage?"

"As real, as legal, as binding, as a wedding in St. Paul's."

"Nobody in this county has ever been married so. I should blush to be seen about after it."

"Our first happy year would not be passed in this country. We should go abroad for six months."

"Ay, fly from shame."

"On our return, we should be received with open arms by my own people in Huntingdonshire, until your people came round, as they always do."

He then showed her a letter, in which his pearl of a cousin said they would receive his wife with open arms, and make her as happy as they could. Uncle Tom was coming home from India, with two hundred thousand pounds; he was a confirmed old bachelor, and Edward his favorite, etc.

Zoe faltered a little; so then he pressed her hard with love, and entreaties, and promises, and even hysterical tears; then she began to cry, — a sure sign of yielding. "Give me time," she said; "give me time."

He groaned, and said there was no time to lose; otherwise he never would have urged her so.

For all that, she could not be drawn to a decision. She must think over such a step.

Next morning, at the usual time, he came to know his fate. But she did not appear. He waited an hour for her. She did not come. He began to rage and storm, and curse his folly for driving her so hard.

At last she came, and found him pale with anxiety, and looking utterly miserable. She told him she had passed a sleepless night, and her head had ached so in the morning, she could not move.

"My poor darling!" said he, "and I am the cause. Say no more about it, dear one. I see you do not love me as I love you, and I forgive you."

She smiled sadly at that, for she was surer of her own love than his.

Zoe had passed a night of torment and vacillation; and but for her brother having paraded Mademoiselle Klosking in his mother's sables, she would, I think, have held out. But this turned her a little against her brother; and, as he was the main obstacle to her union

with Severne, love and pity conquered. Yet still honor and pride had their say. "Edward," said she, "I love you with all my heart, and share your fears that accident may separate us. I will let you decide for both of us. But, before you decide, be warned of one thing. I am a girl no longer, but a woman, who has been distracted with many passions. If any slur rests on my fair name, deeply as I love you now, I shall abhor you then."

He turned pale, for her eye flashed dismay into his craven soul.

He said nothing, and she continued: "If you insist on this hasty, half-clandestine marriage, then I consent to this — I will go with you before the registrar, and I shall come back here directly. Next morning early we will start for Scotland, and be married that other way before witnesses. Then your fears will be at an end, for you believe in these marriages; only as I do not, — for I look on these *legal* marriages merely as solemn betrothals, — I shall be Miss Zoe Vizard, and expect you to treat me so, until I have been married in a church, like a lady."

"Of course you shall," said he, and overwhelmed her with expressions of gratitude, respect, and affection.

This soothed her troubled mind, and she let him take her hand, and pour his honeyed flatteries into her ear, as he walked her slowly up and down.

She could hardly tear herself away from the soft pressure of his hand and the fascination of his tongue, and she left him, more madly in love with him than ever, and ready to face anything but dishonor for him. She was to come out at twelve o'clock, and walk into Bagley with him to betroth herself to him, as she chose to consider it, before the stipendiary magistrate, who married couples in that way. Of the two marriages she had consented to, merely as preliminaries to a real mar-

riage, Zoe despised this the most; for the Scotch marriage was, at all events, ancient, and respectable lovers had been driven to it again and again.

She was behind her time, and Severne thought her courage had failed her after all; but no; at half-past twelve she came out, and walked briskly towards Bagley.

He was behind her, and followed her. She took his arm nervously. "Let me feel you all the way," she said, "to give me courage."

So they walked arm in arm; and, as they went, his courage secretly wavered; hers rose at every step.

About half a mile from the town they met a carriage and pair.

At sight of them a gentleman on the box tapped at the glass window and said, hurriedly, "Here they are *together*."

Mademoiselle Klosking said, "Stop the carriage;" then, pausing a little, "Mr. Vizard — on your word of honor, no violence."

The carriage was drawn up, Ashmead opened the door in a trice, and La Klosking, followed by Vizard, stepped out, and stood like a statue before Edward Severne and Zoe Vizard.

Severne dropped her arm directly, and was panic-stricken.

Zoe uttered a little scream at the sight of Vizard; but the next moment took fire at her rival's audacity, and stepped boldly before her lover with flashing eyes and expanding nostrils that literally breathed defiance.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

"You infernal scoundrel!" roared Vizard, and took a stride towards Severne.

"No violence," said Ina Klosking, sternly; "it will be an insult to this lady and me."

"Very well, then," said Vizard, grimly. "I must wait till I catch him alone."

"Meantime, permit me to speak, sir," said Ina. "Believe me, I have a better right than even you."

"Then, pray ask my sister why I find her on that villain's arm."

"I should not answer her," said Zoe, haughtily. "But my brother I will. Harrington, all this vulgar abuse confirms me in my choice. I take his arm, because I have accepted his hand. I am going into Bagley with him to become his wife."

This announcement took away Vizard's breath for a moment, and Ina Klosking put in her word. "You cannot do that: pray be warned. He is leading you to infamy."

"Infamy! What! because he cannot give me a suit of sables? Infamy! because we prefer virtuous poverty to vice and wealth?"

"No, young lady," said Ina, coloring faintly at the taunt; "but because you could only be his paramour — not his wife. He is married already."

At these words, spoken with that power Ina Klosking could always command, Zoe Vizard turned ashy pale. But she fought on bravely. "Married? It is false! To whom?"

"To me."

"I thought so. Now, I know it is not true. He left you months before we ever knew him."

"Look at him. He does not say it is false."

Zoe turned on Severne, and at his face her own heart quaked. "Are you married to this lady?" she asked; and her eyes, dilated to their full size, searched his every feature.

"Not that I know of," said he, impudently.

"Is that the serious answer you expected, Miss Vizard?" said Ina, keenly; then to Severne: "You are unwise to insult the woman on whom, from this day, you must depend for bread. Miss Vizard, to you I speak, and not to this shameless man. For your mother's sake, do me justice. I have loved him dearly; but now I abhor him. Would I could break the tie that binds us, and give him to you, or to any lady who would have him. But I cannot. And shall I hold my tongue, and let you be ruined and dishonored? I am an older woman than you, and bound by gratitude to all your house. Dear lady, I have taxed my strength to save you. I feel that strength waning. Pray read this paper, and consent to save *yourself*."

"I will read it," said Rhoda Gale, interfering. "I know German. It is an authorized duplicate, certifying the marriage of Edward Severne of Willingham in Huntingdonshire, England, to Ina Ferris, daughter of Walter Ferris and Eva Klosking, of Zutzig, in Denmark. The marriage was solemnized at Berlin, and here are the signatures of several witnesses: Eva Klosking; Fräulein Graafe; Zug, the Capellmeister; Vicomte Meurice, French *attaché;* Count Hompesch, Bavarian plenipotentiary; Herr Formes."

Ina explained, in a voice that was now feeble, "I was a public character; my marriage was public: not like

the clandestine union which is all he dared offer to this well-born lady."

"The Bavarian and French ministers are both in London," said Vizard, eagerly. "We can easily learn if these signatures are forged, like *your* acceptances."

But, if one shadow of doubt remained, Severne now removed it: he uttered a scream of agony, and fled, as if the demons of remorse and despair were spurring him with red-hot rowels.

"There, you little idiot!" roared Vizard, "does that open your eyes?"

"O Mr. Vizard!" said Ina, reproachfully, "for pity's sake, think only of her youth, and what she has to suffer. I can do no more for her: I feel — so — faint."

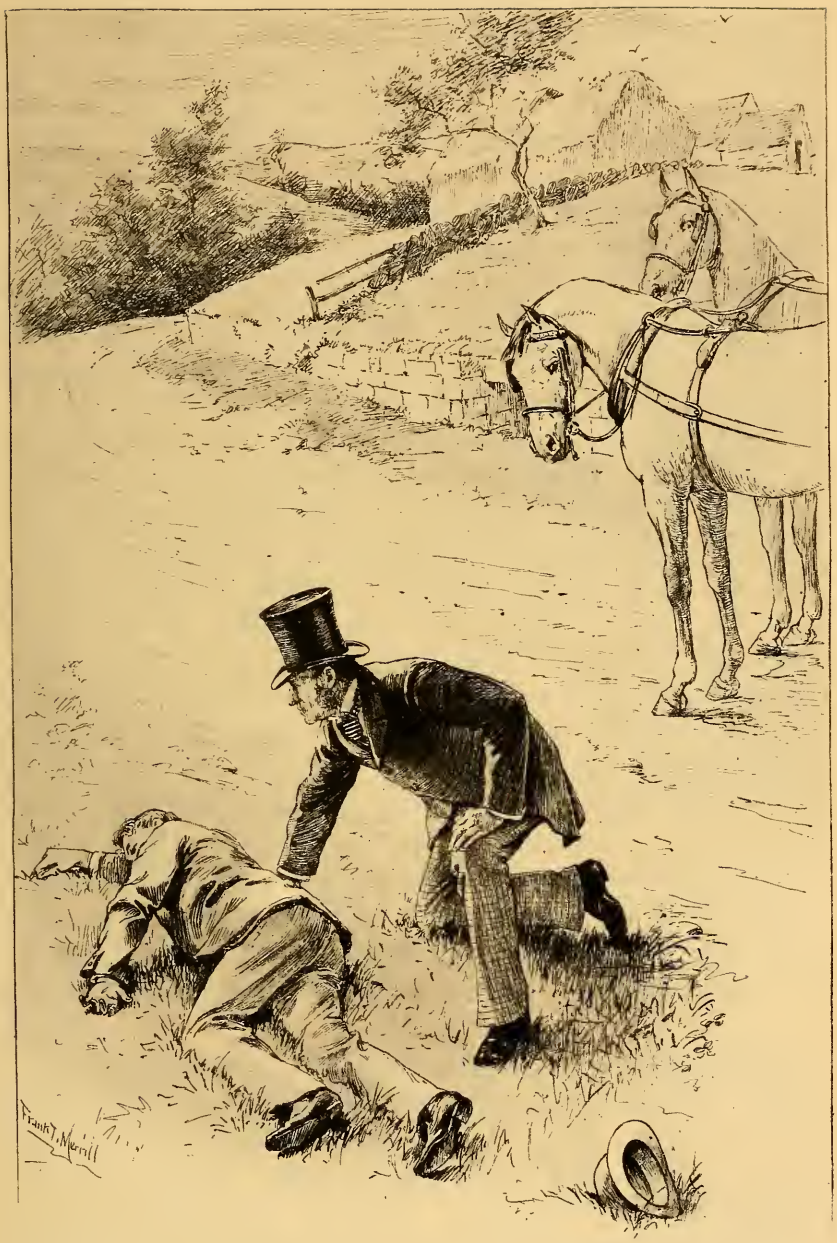
Ashmead and Rhoda supported her into the carriage; Vizard, touched to the heart by Ina's appeal, held out his eloquent arms to his stricken sister, and she tottered to him, and clung to him, all limp and broken, and wishing she could sink out of the sight of all mankind. He put his strong arm round her, and, though his own heart was desolate and broken, he supported that broken flower of womanhood, and half led, half lifted her on, until he laid her on a sofa in Somerville Villa. Then, for the first time, he spoke to her. "We are both desolate now, my child. Let us love one another. I will be ten times tenderer to you than I ever have been." She gave a great sob, but she was past speaking.

Ina Klosking, Miss Gale, and Ashmead returned in the carriage to Bagley. Half a mile out of the town, they found a man lying on the pathway, with his hat off, and white as a sheet. It was Edward Severne. He had run till he dropped.

Ashmead got down, and examined him.

He came back to the carriage-door, looking white enough himself. "It is all over," said he; "the man is dead."

*Ashmead got down and examined him*


Frank T. Merrill

Miss Gale was out in a moment, and examined him. "No," said she; "the heart does not beat perceptibly; but he breathes. It is another of those seizures. Help me get him into the carriage."

This was done, and the driver ordered to go a foot-pace.

The stimulants Miss Gale had brought for Ina Klosking were now applied to revive this malefactor; and both ladies actually ministered to him with compassionate faces. He was a villain; but he was superlatively handsome, and a feather might turn the scale of life or death.

The seizure, though really appalling to look at, did not last long. He revived a little in the carriage, and was taken, still insensible, but breathing hard, into a room in the railway hotel. When he was out of danger, Miss Gale felt Ina Klosking's pulse, and insisted on her going to Taddington by the next train, and leaving Severne to the care of Mr. Ashmead.

Ina, who, in truth, was just then most unfit for any more trials, feebly consented, but not until she had given Ashmead some important instructions respecting her malefactor, and supplied him with funds. Miss Gale also instructed Ashmead how to proceed in case of a relapse, and provided him with materials.

The ladies took a train, which arrived soon after; and, being so fortunate as to get a ladies' carriage all to themselves, they sat intertwined and rocking together, and Ina Klosking found relief at last in a copious flow of tears.

Rhoda got her to Hillstoke, cooked for her, nursed her, lighted fires, aired her bed, and these two friends slept together in each other's arms.

Ashmead had a hard time of it with Severne; he managed pretty well with him at first, because he stupefied him with brandy before he had come to his senses,

and in that state got him into the next train. But, as the fumes wore off, and Severne realized his villany, his defeat, and his abject condition between the two women he had wronged, he suddenly uttered a yell, and made a spring at the window. Ashmead caught him by his calves, and dragged him so powerfully down, that his face struck the floor hard, and his nose bled profusely. The hemorrhage and the blow quieted him for a time, and then Ashmead gave him more brandy, and got him to the "Swan," in a half-lethargic lull. This faithful agent and man-of-all-work took a private sitting-room with a double-bedded room adjoining it, and ordered a hot supper with champagne and madeira.

Severne lay on a sofa, moaning.

The waiter stared. "Trouble!" whispered Ashmead, confidentially. "Take no notice. Supper as quick as possible."

By and by Severne started up, and began to rave and tear about the room, cursing his hard fate, and ended in a kind of hysterical fit. Ashmead, being provided by Miss Gale with salts and aromatic vinegar, etc., applied them, and ended by dashing a tumbler of water right into his face, which did him more good than chemistry.

Then he tried to awaken manhood in the fellow. "What are *you* howling about?" said he. "Why, you are the only sinner, and you are the least sufferer. Come, drop snivelling, and eat a bit. Trouble don't do on an empty stomach."

Severne said he would try; but begged the waiter might not be allowed to stare at a broken-hearted man.

"Broken fiddlestick!" said honest Joe.

Severne tried to eat, but could not. But he could drink, and said so.

Ashmead gave him champagne in tumblers, and that, on his empty stomach, set him raving, and saying life

was hell to him now. But presently he fell to weeping bitterly, in which condition Ashmead forced him to bed, and there he slept heavily. In the morning Ashmead sat by his bedside, and tried to bring him to reason. "Now look here," said he, "you are a lucky fellow, if you will only see it. You have escaped bigamy and a jail, and as a reward for your good conduct to your wife, and the many virtues you have exhibited in a short space of time, I am instructed by that lady to pay you twenty pounds every Saturday at twelve o'clock. It is only a thousand a year: but don't you be down-hearted; I conclude she will raise your salary as you advance. You must forge her name to a heavy check, rob a church, and abduct a school-girl or two — misses in their teens and wards of chancery preferred — and she will make it thirty, no doubt;" and Joe looked very sour.

"That for her twenty pounds a week!" cried this injured man. "She owes me two thousand pounds and more. She has been my enemy, and her own. The fool! — to go and peach! She had only to hold her tongue and be Mrs. Vizard, and then she would have had a rich husband, that adores her, and I should have had my darling, beautiful Zoe, the only woman I ever loved or ever shall."

"Oh," said Ashmead, "then you expected your wife to commit bigamy, and so make it smooth to you?"

"*Of course I did,*" was the worthy Severne's reply; "and so she would, if she had had a grain of sense. See what a contrast now! We are all unhappy, — herself included, — and it is all her doing."

"Well, young man," said Ashmead, drawing a long breath; "didn't I tell you you are a lucky fellow? You have got twenty pounds a week, and that blest boon, 'a conscience void of offence.' You are a happy man. Here's a strong cup of tea for you: just you drink it,

and then get up and take the train to the little village. There kindred spirits and fresh delights await you. You are not to adorn Barfordshire any longer — that is the order."

"Well, I'll go to London — but not without you."

"Me! What do you want of *me?*"

"You are a good fellow, and the only friend I have left. But for you I should be dead or mad. You have pulled me through."

"Through the window I did. Lord forgive me for it," said Joseph. "Well, I'll go up to town with you; but I can't be always tied to your tail. I haven't got twenty pounds a week. To be sure," he added, dryly, "I haven't earned it. That is one comfort."

He telegraphed to Hillstoke, and took Severne up to London.

There the Bohemian very soon found he could live, and even derive some little enjoyment — from his vices — without Joseph Ashmead. He visited him punctually every Saturday, and conversed delightfully. If he came any other day, it was sure to be for an advance: he never got it.

## CHAPTER XXX.

Fanny Dover was sent for directly to Somerville Villa; and three days after the distressing scene I have endeavored to describe, Vizard brought his wrecked sister home. Her condition was pitiable: and the moment he reached Vizard Court, he mounted his horse, and rode to Hillstoke to bring Miss Gale down to her.

There he found Ina Klosking, with her boxes at the door, waiting for the fly that was to take her away.

It was a sad interview. He thanked her deeply for her noble conduct to his sister, and then he could not help speaking of his own disappointment.

Mademoiselle Klosking, on this occasion, was simple, sad, and even tender, within prudent limits. She treated this as a parting forever, and therefore made no secret of her esteem for him. "But," said she, "I hope one day to hear you have found a partner worthy of you. As for me, who am tied for life to one I despise, and can never love again, I shall seek my consolation in music, and, please God, in charitable actions."

He kissed her hand at parting, and gave her a long, long look of miserable regret, that tried her composure hard, and often recurred to her memory.

She went up to London; took a small suburban house; led a secluded life, and devoted herself to her art, making a particular study now of sacred music; she collected volumes of it, and did not disdain to buy it at bookstalls, or wherever she could find it.

Ashmead worked for her, and she made her first appearance in a new oratorio. Her songs proved a principal feature in the performance.

Events did not stand still in Barfordshire; but they were tame compared with those I have lately related, and must be despatched in fewer words.

Aunt Maitland recovered unexpectedly from a severe illness, and was a softened woman: she sent Fanny off to keep Zoe company. That poor girl had a bitter time, and gave Doctress Gale great anxiety. She had no brain-fever, but seemed quietly, insensibly, sinking into her grave. No appetite, and indeed was threatened with atrophy at one time. But she was so surrounded with loving-kindness that her shame diminished, her pride rose, and at last her agony was blunted, and only a pensive languor remained to show that she had been crushed, and could not be again the bright, proud, high-spirited beauty of Barfordshire.

For many months she never mentioned either Edward Severne, Ina Klosking, or Lord Uxmoor.

It was a long time before she went outside the gates of her own park. She seemed to hate the outer world.

Her first visit was to Miss Gale; that young lady was now very happy. She had her mother with her. Mrs. Gale had defeated the tricky executor, and had come to England with a tidy little capital, saved out of the fire by her sagacity and spirit.

Mrs. Gale's character has been partly revealed by her daughter. I have only to add she was a homely, well-read woman, of few words, but those few — grape-shot. Example — she said to Zoe, "Young lady, excuse an old woman's freedom, who might be your mother: the troubles of young folk have a deal of self in them; more than you could believe. Now just you try something to take you out of self, and you will be another creature."

"Ah," sighed Zoe, "would to heaven I could!"

"Oh," said Mrs. Gale, "anybody with money can do

it, and the world so full of real trouble. Now, my girl tells me you are kind to the poor: why not do something like Rhoda is doing for this lord she is overseer, or goodness knows what, to?"

Rhoda (*defiantly*), "Viceroy."

"You have money, and your brother will not refuse you a bit o' land. Why not build some of these new-fangled cottages, with fancy gardens, and dwarf palaces for a cow and a pig? Rhoda, child, if I was a poor woman, I could graze a cow in the lanes hereabouts, and feed a pig in the woods. Now you do that for the poor, Miss Vizard, and don't let my girl think for you. Breed your own ideas. That will divert you from self, my dear, and you will begin to find it — there — just as if a black cloud was clearing away from your mind, and letting your heart warm again."

Zoe caught at the idea, and that very day asked Vizard timidly, whether he would let her have some land to build a model cottage or two on?

Will it be believed that the good-natured Vizard made a wry face? "What! two proprietors in Islip." For a moment or two he was all squire. But soon the brother conquered. "Well," said he, "I can't give you a fee-simple; I must think of my heirs: but I will hold a court, and grant you a copyhold; or I'll give you a ninety-nine years' lease at a peppercorn. There's a slip of three acres on the edge of the Green. You shall amuse yourself with that." He made it over to her directly, for a century, at ten shillings a year; and, as he was her surviving trustee, he let her draw in advance on her ten thousand pounds.

Mapping out the ground with Rhoda, settling the gardens, and the miniature pastures, and planning the little houses and out-houses, and talking a great deal, compared with what she transacted, proved really a certain

antidote to that lethargy of woe which oppressed her: and here, for a time, I must leave her, returning slowly to health of body, and some tranquillity of mind; but still subject to fits of shame, and gnawed by bitter regrets.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

The reputation Mademoiselle Klosking gained in the new oratorio, aided by Ashmead's exertions, launched her in a walk of art that accorded with her sentiments.

She sang in the oratorio whenever it could be performed, and also sang select songs from it, and other sacred songs, at concerts.

She was engaged at a musical festival in the very cathedral town whose choir had been so consoling to her. She entered with great zeal into this engagement, and finding there was a general desire to introduce the leading chorister boy to the public in a duet, she surprised them all by offering to sing the second part with him, if he would rehearse it carefully with her at her lodgings. He was only too glad, as might be supposed. She found he had a lovely voice, but little physical culture. He read correctly, but did not even know the nature of the vocal instrument and its construction, which is that of a bagpipe. She taught him how to keep his lungs full in singing, yet not to gasp, and by this simple means enabled him to sing with more than twice the power he had ever exercised yet. She also taught him the swell, a figure of music he knew literally nothing about.

When, after singing a great solo, to salvos of applause, Mademoiselle Klosking took the second part with this urchin, the citizens and all the musical people who haunt a cathedral, were on the tiptoe of expectation. The boy amazed them, and the rich contralto that supported him, and rose and swelled with him in ravishing harmony, enchanted them. The vast improvement in the boy's

style did not escape the hundreds of persons who knew him, and this duet gave La Klosking a great personal popularity.

Her last song, by her own choice, was, "What though I trace" (Handel), and the majestic volume that rang through the echoing vault showed with what a generous spirit she had subdued that magnificent organ not to crush her juvenile partner in the preceding duet.

Amongst the persons present was Harrington Vizard. He had come there against his judgment; but he could not help it.

He had been cultivating a dull tranquillity, and was even beginning his old game of railing on women, as the great disturbers of male peace. At the sight of her, and the sound of her first notes, away went his tranquillity, and he loved her as ardently as ever. But, when she sang his mother's favorite, and the very roof rang, and three thousand souls were thrilled and lifted to heaven by that pure and noble strain, the rapture could not pass away from this one heart; while the ear ached at the cessation of her voice, the heart also ached, and pined, and yearned.

He ceased to resist. From that day he followed her about to her public performances all over the midland counties; and she soon became aware of his presence. She said nothing till Ashmead drew her attention; then, being compelled to notice it, she said it was a great pity. Surely he must have more important duties at home.

Ashmead wanted to recognize him, and put him into the best place vacant; but La Klosking said, "No; I will be more his friend than to lend him the least encouragement."

At the end of that tour she returned to London.

While she was there in her little suburban house, she received a visit from Mr. Edward Severne. He came

to throw himself at her feet, and beg forgiveness. She said she would try and forgive him. He then implored her to forget the past. She told him that was beyond her power. He persisted, and told her he had come to his senses; all his misconduct now seemed a hideous dream, and he found he had never really loved any one but her. So then he entreated her to try him once more; to give him back the treasure of her love.

She listened to him like a woman of marble. "Love where I despise!" said she. "Never. The day has gone by when these words can move me. Come to me for the means of enjoying yourself — gambling, drinking, and your other vices — and I shall indulge you. But do not profane the name of love. I forbid you ever to enter my door on that errand. I presume you want money. There is a hundred pounds. Take it; and keep out of my sight till you have wasted it."

He dashed the notes proudly down. She turned her back on him, and glided into another room.

When she returned he was gone, and the hundred pounds had managed to accompany him.

He went straight from her to Ashmead, and talked big. He would sue for restitution of conjugal rights.

"Don't do that, for my sake," said Ashmead. "She will fly the country like a bird, and live in some village on bread and milk."

"Oh, I would not do *you* an ill turn for the world," said the master of arts. "You have been a kind friend to me. You saved my life. It is imbittered by remorse and recollections of the happiness I have thrown away, and the heart I have wronged. No matter!"

This visit disturbed La Klosking, and disposed her to leave London. She listened to a brilliant offer that was made her, through Ashmead, by the manager of the Italian Opera, who was organizing a provincial tour.

The tour was well advertised in advance, and the company opened to a grand house at Birmingham.

Mademoiselle Klosking had not been long on the stage, when she discovered her discarded husband in the stalls, looking the perfection of youthful beauty. The next minute she saw Vizard in a private box. Mr. Severne applauded her loudly, and flung her a bouquet. Mr. Vizard fixed his eyes on her, beaming with admiration, but made no public demonstration.

The same incident repeated itself every night she sang, and at every town.

At last she spoke about it to Ashmead, in the vague, suggestive way her sex excels in. "I presume you have observed the people in front?"

"Yes, madam. Two in particular."

"Could you not advise him to desist?"

"Which of 'em, madam?"

"Mr. Vizard, of course. He is losing his time, and wasting sentiments it is cruel should be wasted."

Ashmead said he dared not take any liberty with Mr. Vizard.

So the thing went on.

Severne made acquaintance with the manager, and obtained the *entrée* behind the scenes. He brought his wife a bouquet every night, and presented it to her with such reverence and grace, that she was obliged to take it and courtesy, or seem rude to the people about.

Then she wrote to Miss Gale, and begged her to come, if she could.

Miss Gale, who had all this time been writing her love-letters twice a week, immediately appointed her mother viceroy, and went to her friend. Ina Klosking explained the situation to her with a certain slight timidity and confusion not usual to her; and said, "Now, dear, you have more courage than the rest of us; and I know he

has a great respect for you; and, indeed, Miss Dover told me he would quite obey you. Would it not be the act of a friend to advise him to cease this unhappy — What good can come of it? He neglects his own duties, and disturbs me in mine. I sometimes ask myself would it not be kinder of me to give up my business, or practice it elsewhere — Germany, or even Italy?"

"Does he call on you?"

"No."

"Does he write to you?"

"Oh no — I wish he would; because then I should be able to reply like a true friend, and send him away. Consider, dear, it is not like a nobody dangling after a public singer; that is common enough. We are all run after by idle men; even Signorina Zubetta, who has not much voice, nor appearance, and speaks a Genoese *patois* when she is not delivering a libretto. But for a gentleman of position, with a heart of gold, and the soul of an emperor, that he should waste his time and his feelings so, on a woman who can never be anything to him, it is pitiable."

"Well, but after all it is his business; and he is not a child: besides, remember he is really very fond of music. If I were you, I'd look another way, and take no notice."

"But I cannot."

"Ah! — And why not, pray?"

"Because he always takes a box on my left hand, two from the stage. I can't think how he gets it at all the theatres. And then he fixes his eyes on me so, I cannot help stealing a look. He never applauds, nor throws me bouquets. He looks; oh, you cannot conceive how he looks, and the strange effect it is beginning to produce on me!"

"He mesmerizes you?"

"I know not; but it is a growing fascination. Oh, my

dear physician, interfere. If it goes on, we shall be more wretched than ever." Then she enveloped Rhoda in her arms, and rested a hot cheek against hers.

"I see," said Rhoda. "You are afraid he will make you love him."

"I hope not. But artists are impressionable; and being looked at so, by one I esteem, night after night when my nerves are strung — *cela m'agace;*" and she gave a shiver, and then was a little hysterical; and that was very unlike her.

Rhoda kissed her, and said resolutely she would stop it.

"Not unkindly?"

"Oh, no."

"You will not tell him it is offensive to me?"

"No."

"Pray do not give him unnecessary pain."

"No."

"He is not to be mortified."

"No."

"I shall miss him sadly."

"Shall you?"

"Naturally; especially at each new place. Only conceive: — one is always anxious on the stage; and it is one thing to come before a public all strangers, and nearly all poor judges; it is another to see, all ready for your first note, a noble face bright with intelligence and admiration — the face of a friend. Often that one face is the only one I allow myself to see. It hides the whole public."

"Then don't you be silly and send it away. I'll tell you the one fault of your character: you think too much of other people, and too little of yourself. Now that is contrary to the scheme of nature. We are sent into the world to take care of number one."

"What?" said Ina; "are we to be all self-indulgence?

Is there to be no principle, no womanly prudence, foresight, discretion? No: I feel the sacrifice; but no power shall hinder me from making it. If you cannot persuade him, I'll do like other singers. I will be ill, and quit the company."

"Don't do that," said Rhoda. "Now you have put on your iron look, it is no use arguing — I know that to my cost. There — I will talk to him. Only don't hurry me; let me take my opportunity."

This being understood, Ina would not part with her for the present, but took her to the theatre. She dismissed her dresser, at Rhoda's request, and Rhoda filled that office. So they could talk freely.

Rhoda had never been behind the scenes of a theatre before, and she went prying about, ignoring the music, for she was almost earless. Presently, whom should she encounter but Edward Severne? She started, and looked at him like a basilisk. He removed his hat, and drew back a step with a great air of respect and humility. She was shocked and indignant with Ina for letting him be about her. She followed her off the stage into her dressing-room, and took her to task. "I have seen Mr. Severne here."

"He comes every night."

"And you allow him?"

"It is the manager."

"But he would not admit him, if you objected."

"I am afraid to do that."

"Why?"

"We should have an *esclandre*. I find he has had so much consideration for me as to tell no one our relation; and as he has never spoken to me, I do the most prudent thing I can, and take no notice. Should he attempt to intrude himself on me, then it will be time to have him stopped in the hall, and I shall do it *coûte que coûte*.

Ah, my dear friend, mine is a difficult and trying position."

After a very long wait, Ina went down and sang her principal song, with the usual bravas and thunders of applause. She was called on twice, and as she retired, Severne stepped forward, and, with a low, obsequious bow, handed her a beautiful bouquet. She took it with a stately courtesy, but never looked nor smiled. Rhoda saw that and wondered. She thought to herself, "That is carrying politeness a long way. To be sure, she is half a foreigner."

Having done his nightly homage, Severne left the theatre, and soon afterwards the performance concluded, and Ina took her friend home.

Ashmead was in the hall to show his patroness to her carriage — a duty he never failed in. Rhoda shook hands with him, and he said, "Delighted to see you here, miss. You will be a great comfort to her."

The two friends communed till two o'clock in the morning; but the limits of my tale forbid me to repeat what passed. Suffice it to say that Rhoda was fairly puzzled by the situation; but, having a great regard for Vizard, saw clearly enough that he ought to be sent back to Islip. She thought that perhaps the very sight of her would wound his pride, and, finding his mania discovered by a third person, he would go of his own accord: so she called on him.

My lord received her with friendly composure, and all his talk was about Islip. He did not condescend to explain his presence at Carlisle. He knew that *qui s'excuse s'accuse*, and left her to remonstrate. She had hardly courage for that, and hoped it might be unnecessary.

She told Ina what she had done. But her visit was futile; at night there was Vizard in his box.

Next day the company opened in Manchester. Vizard

was in his box there — Severne in front, till Ina's principal song. Then he came round and presented his bouquet. But this time he came up to Rhoda Gale, and asked her whether a penitent man might pay his respects to her in the morning.

She said she believed there were very few penitents in the world.

"I know one," said he.

"Well, I don't, then," said the virago. "But *you* can come, if you are not afraid."

Of course Ina Klosking knew of this appointment two minutes after it was made. She merely said, "Do not let him talk you over."

"He is not so likely to talk me over as you," said Rhoda.

"You are mistaken," was Ina's reply. "I am the one person he will never deceive again."

Rhoda Gale received his visit: he did not beat about the bush, nor fence at all. He declared at once what he came for. He said, "At the first sight of you, whom I have been so ungrateful to, I could not speak; but now I throw myself on your forgiveness. I think you must have seen that my ingratitude has never sat light on me."

"I have seen that you were terribly afraid of me," said she.

"I dare say I was. But I am not afraid of you now; and here, on my knees, I implore you to forgive my baseness, my ingratitude. Oh, Miss Gale, you don't know what it is to be madly in love; one has no principle, no right feeling, against a real passion: and I was madly in love with her. It was through fear of losing her I disowned my physician, my benefactress, who had saved my life. Miserable wretch! It was through fear of losing her that I behaved like a ruffian to my angel wife, and would have committed bigamy, and been a

felon. What was all this but madness? You, who are so wise, will you not forgive me a crime that downright insanity was the cause of?"

"Humph! if I understand right, you wish me to forgive you for looking in my face, and saying to the woman who had saved your life, 'I don't know you'?"

"Yes — if you can. No: now you put it in plain words, I see it is not to be forgiven."

"You are mistaken. It was like a stab to my heart, and I cried bitterly over it."

"Then I deserve to be hanged, that is all."

"But, on consideration, I believe it is as much your nature to be wicked, as it is my angel Ina's to be good. So I forgive you that one thing, you charming villain." She held out her hand to him in proof of her good faith.

He threw himself on his knees directly, and kissed and mumbled her hand, and bedewed it with hysterical tears.

"Oh, don't do that," said she; "or I'm bound to give you a good kick. I hate she-men."

"Give me a moment," said he, "and I will be a man again."

He sat with his face in his hands, gulping a little.

"Come," said she, cocking her head like a keen jackdaw; "now let us have the real object of your visit."

"No, no," said he, inadvertently — "another time will do for that. I am content with your forgiveness. Now I can wait."

"What for?"

"Can you ask? Do you consider this a happy state of things?"

"Certainly not. But it can't be helped: and we have to thank you for it."

"It could be helped, in time. If you would persuade her to take the first step."

"What step?"

"Not to disown her husband. To let him at least be her friend — her penitent, humble friend. We *are* man and wife. If I were to say so publicly, she would admit it. In this respect at least I have been generous: will she not be generous too? What harm could it do her if we lived under the same roof, and I took her to the theatre, and fetched her home, and did little friendly offices for her?"

"And so got the thin edge of the wedge in, eh? Mr. Severne, I decline all interference in a matter so delicate, and in favor of a person who would use her as ill as ever, if he once succeeded in recovering her affections."

So then she dismissed him peremptorily.

But, true to Vizard's interest, she called on him again, and, after a few preliminaries, let him know that Severne was every night behind the scenes.

A spasm crossed his face. "I am quite aware of that," said he. "But he is never admitted into her house."

"How do you know?"

"He is under constant surveillance."

"Spies?"

"No — thief-takers; all from Scotland Yard."

"And love brings men down to this. What is it for?"

"When I am sure of your co-operation, I will let you know my hopes."

"He doubts my friendship," said Rhoda, sorrowfully.

"No; only your discretion."

"I will be discreet."

"Well, then, sooner or later, he is sure to form some improper connection or other; and then I hope you will aid me in persuading her to divorce him."

"That is not so easy in this country. It is not like our Western States, where, the saying is, they give you five minutes at a railway station for dī—vorce."

"You forget she is a German Protestant, and the marriage was in that country. It will be easy enough."

"Very well; dismiss it from your mind. She will never come before the public in that way. Nothing you nor I could urge would induce her."

Vizard replied, doggedly, "I will never despair, so long as she keeps him out of her house."

Rhoda told Ina Klosking this, and said, "Now it is in your own hands. You have only to let your charming villain into your house, and Mr. Vizard will return to Islip."

Ina Klosking buried her face in her hands, and thought.

At night, Vizard in his box, as usual. Severne behind the scenes with his bouquet. But this night he stayed for the ballet, to see a French *danseuse* who had joined them. He was acquainted with her before, and had a sprightly conversation with her. In other words, he renewed an old flirtation.

The next opera night all went as usual. Vizard in the box, looking sadder than usual. Rhoda's good sense had not been entirely wasted. Severne, with his bouquet, and his grave humility, until the play ended, and La Klosking passed out into the hall. Her back was hardly turned, when Mlle. Lafontaine, dressed for the ballet, in a most spicy costume, danced up to her old friend, and slapped his face very softly with a rose, then sprang away, and stood on her defence.

"I'll have that rose," cried Severne.

"*Nenni.*"

"And a kiss into the bargain."

"*Jamais.*"

"C'est ce que nous verrons."

He chased her. She uttered a feigned "Ah!" and darted away. He followed her; she crossed the scene at the back, where it was dark, bounded over an open trap,

which she saw just in time, but Severne, not seeing it, because she was between him and it, fell through it, and striking the mazarine, fell into the cellar, fifteen feet below the stage.

The screams of the dancer soon brought a crowd round the trap, and reached Mademoiselle Klosking just as she was going out to her carriage. "There!" she cried: "another accident!" and she came back, making sure it was some poor carpenter come to grief, as usual. On such occasions her purse was always ready.

They brought Severne up sensible, but moaning, and bleeding at the temple, and looking all streaky about the face.

They were going to take him to the infirmary; but Mademoiselle Klosking, with a face of angelic pity, said, "No; he bleeds, he bleeds. He must go to my house."

They stared a little; but it takes a good deal to astonish people in a theatre.

Severne was carried out, his head hastily bandaged, and he was lifted into La Klosking's carriage. One of the people of the theatre was directed to go on the box, and La Klosking and Ashmead supported him, and he was taken to her lodgings. She directed him to be laid on a couch, and a physician sent for, Miss Gale not having yet returned from Liverpool, whither she had gone to attend a lecture.

Ashmead went for the physician. But almost at the door he met Miss Gale and Mr. Vizard.

"Miss," said he, "you are wanted. There has been an accident. Mr. Severne has fallen through a trap, and into the cellar."

"No bones broken?"

"Not he: he has only broken his head; and that will cost her a broken heart."

"Where is he?"

"Where I hoped never to see him again."

"What! in her house?" said Rhoda, and hurried off at once.

"Mr. Ashmead," said Vizard, "a word with you."

"By all means, sir," said Ashmead, "as we go for the doctor. Dr. Menteith has a great name. He lives close by your hotel, sir."

As they went Vizard asked him what he meant by saying this incident would cost her a broken heart.

"Why, sir," said Ashmead, "he is on his good behavior to get back; has been for months begging and praying just to be let live under the same roof. She has always refused. But some fellows have such luck. I don't say he fell down a trap on purpose; but he has done it, and no broken bones, but plenty of blood. That is the very thing to overcome a woman's feelings; and she is not proof against pity. He will have her again. Why, she is his nurse now; and see how that will work. We have a week's more business here; and, by bad luck, a dead fortnight, all along of Dublin falling through unexpectedly. He is as artful as Old Nick; he will spin out that broken head of his, and make it last all the three weeks; and she will nurse him, and he will be weak, and grateful, and cry, and beg her pardon six times a day; and she is only a woman, after all; and they are man and wife, when all is done: the road is beaten. They will run upon it again, till his time is up to play the rogue as bad as ever."

"You torture me," said Vizard.

"I am afraid I do, sir; but I feel it my duty. Mr. Vizard, you are a noble gentleman, and I am only what you see; but the humblest folk will have their likes and dislikes, and I have a great respect for you, sir. I can't tell you the mixture of things I feel when I see you in the same box every night. Of course I am her agent,

and the house would not be complete without you; but as a man I am sorry — especially now that she has let him into her house. Take a humble friend's advice, sir, and cut it. Don't you come between any woman and her husband, especially a public lady. She will never be more to you than she is. She is a good woman, and he must keep gaining ground. He has got the pull. Rouse all your pride, sir, and your manhood, and you have got plenty of both, and cut it; don't look right nor left, but cut it — and forgive my presumption."

Vizard was greatly moved. "Give me your hand," he said; "you are a worthy man. I'll act on your advice, and never forget what I owe you. Stick to me like a leech, and see me off by the next train, for I am going to tear my heart out of my bosom."

Luckily there was a train in half an hour; and Ashmead saw him off; then went to supper. He did not return to Ina's lodgings. He did not want to see Severne nursed. He liked the fellow, too; but he saw through him clean; and he worshipped Ina Klosking.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

At one o'clock next day, Ashmead received a note from Mademoiselle Klosking, saying, "Arrange with Mr. X. to close my tour with Manchester. Pay the fortnight if required." She was with the company at a month's notice on either side, you must understand.

Instead of going to the manager, he went at once, in utter dismay, to Mademoiselle Klosking, and there learned in substance what I must now briefly relate.

Miss Gale found Edward Severne deposited on a sofa. Ina was on her knees by his side, sponging his bleeding temple, with looks of gentle pity. Strange to say, the wound was in the same place as his wife's, but more contused, and no large vein was divided. Miss Gale soon stanched that. She asked him where his pain was. He said it was in his head and his back; and he cast a haggard, anxious look on her.

"Take my arm," said she. "Now, stand up."

He tried but could not, and said his legs were benumbed. Miss Gale looked grave.

"Lay him on my bed," said La Klosking. "That is better than these hard couches."

"You are right," said Miss Gale. "Ring for the servants. He must be moved gently."

He was carried in, and set upon the edge of the bed, and his coat and waistcoat taken off. Then he was laid gently down on the bed, and covered with a down quilt.

Doctress Gale then requested Ina to leave the room, while she questioned the patient.

Ina retired.

In a moment or two Miss Gale came out to her softly.

At sight of her face, La Klosking said, "Oh, dear, it is more serious than we thought."

"Very serious."

"Poor Edward!"

"Collect all your courage, for I cannot lie, either to patient or friend."

"And you are right," said La Klosking trembling. "I see he is in danger."

"Worse than that. Where there's danger there is hope; here there is none. HE IS A DEAD MAN!"

"Oh, no! no!"

"He has broken his back, and nothing can save him. His lower limbs have already lost sensation; death will creep over the rest. Do not disturb your mind with idle hopes. You have two things to thank God for — that you took him into your own house, and that he will die easily. Indeed, were he to suffer, I should stupefy him at once, for nothing can *hurt* him."

Ina Klosking turned faint, and her knees gave way under her. Rhoda ministered to her, and while she was so employed Dr. Menteith was announced. He was shown in to the patient, and the accident described to him. He questioned the patient, and examined him alone.

He then came out, and said he would draw a prescription. He did so.

"Doctor," said La Klosking, "tell me the truth. It cannot be worse than I fear."

"Madam," said the doctor, "medicine can do nothing for him. The spinal cord is divided. Give him anything he fancies, and my prescription if he suffers pain, not otherwise. Shall I send you a nurse?"

"No," said Mademoiselle Klosking, "*we* will nurse him night and day."

He retired, and the friends entered on their sad duties.

When Severne saw them both by his bedside, with earnest looks of pity, he said, "Do not worry yourselves, I'm booked for the long journey. Ah, well, I shall die where I ought to have lived, and might have, if I had not been a fool."

Ina wept bitterly.

They nursed him night and day. He suffered little, and when he did Miss Gale stupefied the pain at once; for, as she truly said, "nothing can hurt him." Vitality gradually retired to his head, and lingered there a whole day. But to his last moment the art of pleasing never abandoned him. Instead of worrying for this or that every moment, he showed in this desperate condition singular patience and well-bred fortitude. He checked his wife's tears; assured her it was all for the best, and that he was reconciled to the inevitable. "I have had a happier time than I deserved," said he; "and now I have a painless death, nursed by two sweet women. My only regret is that I shall not be able to repay your devotion, Ina, nor become worthy of your friendship, Miss Gale."

He died without fear, it being his conviction that he should return after death to the precise condition in which he was before birth; and when they begged him to see a clergyman, he said, "Pray do not give yourselves or him that trouble. I can melt back into the universe without his assistance."

He even died content; for this polished Bohemian had often foreseen that, if he lived long, he should die miserably.

But the main feature of his end was his extraordinary politeness. He paid Miss Gale compliments just as if he were at his ease on a sofa; and scarce an hour before his decease he said faintly, "I declare — I have been so busy — dying — I have forgotten to send my kind regards

to good Mr. Ashmead. Pray tell him I did not forget his kindness to me."

He just ceased to live, so quiet was his death, and a smile rested on his dead features, and they were as beautiful as ever.

So ended a fair, pernicious creature, endowed too richly with the art of pleasing, and quite devoid of principle. Few bad men knew right so well, and went so wrong.

Ina buried her face for hours on his bed, and kissed his cold features and hand. She had told him before he died she would recall all her resolutions, if he would live. But he was gone. Death buries a man's many faults, and his few virtues rise again. She mourned him sincerely, and would not be comforted; she purchased a burying place forever, and laid him in it; then she took her aching heart far away, and was lost to the public and to all her English friends.

The faithful Rhoda accompanied her half-way to London, then returned to her own duties in Barfordshire.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

I MUST now retrograde a little, to relate something rather curious, and I hope not uninteresting.

Zoe Vizard had been for some time acting on Mrs. Gale's advice; building, planning for the good of the poor, and going out of herself more and more. She compared notes constantly with Miss Gale, and conceived a friendship for her. It had been a long time coming, because at first she disliked Miss Gale's manners very much. But that lady had nursed her tenderly, and now advised her; and Zoe, who could not do anything by halves, became devoted to her.

As she warmed to her good work, she gave signs of clearer judgment. She never mentioned Severne; but she no longer absolutely avoided Ina Klosking's name; and one day she spoke of her as a high-principled woman, for which the Gale kissed her on the spot.

One name she often uttered, and always with regret and self-reproach — Lord Uxmoor's. I think that, now she was herself building and planning for the permanent improvement of the poor, she felt the tie of a kindred sentiment. Uxmoor was her predecessor in this good work too; and would have been her associate, if she had not been so blind. This thought struck deep in her. Her mind ran more and more on Uxmoor, his manliness, his courage in her defence, and his gentlemanly fortitude and bravery in leaving her without a word, at her request. Running over all these, she often blushed with shame, and her eyes filled with sorrow at thinking of how she had treated him, and lost him forever by not deserving him.

She even made oblique and timid inquiries; but could learn nothing of him, except that he sent periodical remittances to Miss Gale, for managing his improvements. These, however, came in through a country agent from a town agent, and left no clew.

But one fine day, with no warning except to his own people, Lord Uxmoor came home, and the next day rode to Hillstoke to talk matters over with Miss Gale. He was fortunate enough to find her at home. He thanked her for the zeal and enthusiasm she had shown, and the progress his works had made under her supervision.

He was going away without even mentioning the Vizard family.

But the crafty Gale detained him. "Going to Vizard Court?" said she.

"No," said he very dryly.

"Ah, I understand; but perhaps you would not mind going with me as far as Islip. There is something there I wish you to see."

"Humph! Is it anything very particular? Because" —

"It is. Three cottages rising, with little flower-gardens in front, square plots behind, and arrangements for breeding calves, with other ingenious novelties. A new head come into our business, my lord."

"You have converted Vizard? I thought you would. He is a satirical fellow; but he will listen to reason."

"No, it is not Mr. Vizard; indeed it is no convert of mine. It is an independent enthusiast. But I really believe your work at home had some hand in firing her enthusiasm."

"A lady! Do I know her?"

"You may. I suppose you know everybody in Barfordshire. Will you come? Do!"

"Of course I will come, Miss Gale. Please tell one of your people to walk my horse down after us."

She had her hat on in a moment, and walked him down to Islip.

Her tongue was not idle on the road. "You don't ask after the people," said she. "There's poor Miss Vizard. She had a sad illness. We were almost afraid we should lose her."

"Heaven forbid!" said Uxmoor, startled by this sudden news.

"Mademoiselle Klosking got quite well: and oh! what do you think? Mr. Severne turned out to be her husband."

"What is that?" shouted Uxmoor, and stopped dead short. "Mr. Severne a married man!"

"Yes; and Mademoiselle Klosking a married woman."

"You amaze me. Why, that Mr. Severne was paying his attentions to Miss Vizard."

"So I used to fancy," said Rhoda, carelessly. "But you see, it came out he was married, and so of course she packed him off with a flea in his ear."

"Did she? — when was that?"

"Let me see, it was the 17th of October."

"Why, that was the very day I left England."

"How odd! Why did you not stay another week? Gentlemen are so impatient. Never mind, that is an old story now. Here we are: those are the cottages. The workmen are at dinner. Ten to one the enthusiast is there: this is her time. You stay here; I'll go and see." She went off on tiptoe, and peeped and pried here and there, like a young witch. Presently she took a few steps towards him, with her finger mysteriously to her lips, and beckoned him. He entered into the pantomime — she seemed so earnest in it — and came to her softly.

"Do just take a peep in at that opening for a door,"

said she; "then you'll see her; her back is turned. She is lovely; only, you know, she has been ill, and I don't think she is very happy."

Uxmoor thought this peeping at enthusiasts rather an odd proceeding, but Miss Gale had primed his curiosity, and he felt naturally proud of a female pupil. He stepped up lightly, looked in at the door, and, to his amazement, saw Zoe Vizard sitting on a carpenter's bench, with her lovely head in the sun's rays. He started, then gazed, then devoured her with his eyes.

What! was this his pupil?

How gentle and sad she seemed! All his stoicism melted at the sight of her. She sat in a sweet pensive attitude, pale and drooping, but, to his fancy, lovelier than ever. She gave a little sigh. His heart yearned. She took out a letter, read it slowly, and said, softly and slowly, "Poor fel-low!" He thought he recognized his own handwriting, and could stand no more. He rushed in, and was going to speak to her; but she screamed, and no conjuror ever made a card disappear quicker than she did that letter, as she bounded away like a deer, and stood, blushing scarlet, and palpitating all over.

Uxmoor was ashamed of his *brusquerie.*

"What a brute I am, to frighten you like this!" said he. "Pray forgive me; but the sight of you, after all these weary months — and you said 'Poor fellow!'"

"Did I?" said Zoe, faintly, looking scared.

"Yes, sweet Zoe; and you were reading a letter."

No reply.

"I thought the poor fellow might be myself. Not that I am to be pitied, if you think of me still."

"I do, then — very often. Oh, Lord Uxmoor, I want to go down on my knees to you."

"That is odd, now; for it is exactly what I should like to do to you."

"What for? It is I who have behaved so ill."

"Never mind that; I love you."

"But you mustn't. You must love some worthy person."

"Oh, you leave that to me. I have no other intention. But may I just see whose letter you were reading?"

"Oh, pray don't ask me."

"I insist on knowing."

"I will not tell you. There it is." She gave it to him with a guilty air, and hid her face.

"Dear Zoe, suppose I was to repeat the offer I made here?"

"I advise you not," said she, all in a flurry.

"Why?"

"Because — because — I might say 'yes.'"

"Well, then, I'll take my chance once more. Zoe, will you try and love me?"

"Try? I believe I do love you, or nearly. I think of you very often."

"Then you will do something to make me happy."

"Anything; everything."

"Will you marry me?"

"Yes, that I will," said Zoe, almost impetuously; "and then," with a grand look of conscious beauty, "I can *make* you forgive me."

Uxmoor, on this, caught her in his arms, and kissed her with such fire that she uttered a little stifled cry of alarm; but it was soon followed by a sigh of complacency, and she sank, resistless, on his manly breast.

So, after two sieges, he carried that fair citadel by assault.

Then let not the manly heart despair, nor take a mere brace of "Noes" from any woman. Nothing short of three negatives is serious.

They walked out arm in arm, and very close to each other; and he left her, solemnly engaged.

Leaving this pair to the delights of courtship, and growing affection on Zoe's side, — for warm attachment of the noblest kind did grow, by degrees, out of her penitence and esteem, and desire to repair her fault, — I must now take up the other thread of this narrative, and apologize for having inverted the order of events; for it was, in reality, several days after this happy scene, that Mademoiselle Klosking sent for Miss Gale.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

Vizard, then, with Ashmead, returned home in despair; and Zoe, now happy in her own mind, was all tenderness and sisterly consolation. They opened their hearts to each other, and she showed her wish to repay the debt she owed him. How far she might have succeeded, in time, will never be known. For he had hardly been home a week, when Miss Gale returned, all in black, and told him Severne was dead and buried.

He was startled, and even shocked, remembering old times; but it was not in human nature he should be sorry. Not to be indecorously glad at so opportune an exit, was all that could be expected from him.

When she had given him the details, his first question was, "How did she bear it?"

"She is terribly cut up — more than one would think possible; for she was ice and marble to him, before he was hurt to death."

"Where is she?"

"Gone to London. She will write to me, I suppose, poor dear. But one must give her time."

From that hour Vizard was in a state of excitement, hoping to hear from Ina Klosking, or about her; but unwilling, from delicacy, to hurry matters.

At last he became impatient, and wrote to Ashmead, whose address he had, and said, frankly, he had a delicacy in intruding on Mademoiselle Klosking in her grief. Yet his own feelings would not allow him to seem to neglect her. Would Mr. Ashmead, then, tell him where she was, as she had not written to any one in

Barfordshire — not even to her tried friend, Miss Gale? He received an answer by return of post: —

Dear Sir, — I am grieved to tell you that Mademoiselle Klosking has retired from public life. She wrote to me three weeks ago, from Dover, requesting me to accept, as a token of her esteem, the surplus money I hold in hand for her — I always drew her salary — and bidding me farewell. The sum included her profits by Psalmody, minus her expenses, and was so large it could never have been intended as a mere recognition of my humble services; and I think I have seldom felt so down-hearted as on receiving this princely donation. It has enabled me to take better offices, and it may be the foundation of a little fortune; but I feel I have lost the truly great lady who has made a man of me. Sir, the relish is gone for my occupation. I can never be so happy as I was in working the interests of that great genius, whose voice made our leading soprani sound like whistles, and who honored me with her friendship. Sir, she was not like other leading ladies, she never bragged, never spoke ill of any one; and *you* can testify to her virtue and her discretion.

I am truly sorry to learn from you that she has written to no one in Barfordshire. I saw, by her letter to me, she had left the stage; but her dropping you all looks as if she had left the world. I do hope she has not been so mad as to go into one of those cursed convents.

Mr. Vizard, I will now write to friends in all the Continental towns where there is good music. She will not be able to keep away from that long. I will also send photographs; and hope we may hear something. If not, perhaps a *judicious advertisement* might remind her that she is inflicting pain upon persons to whom she is dear.

I am, sir, your obliged and grateful servant,

Joseph Ashmead.

Here was a blow. I really believe Vizard felt this more deeply than all his other disappointments.

He brooded over it for a day or two; and then, as he thought Miss Gale a very ill-used person, though not, of

course, so ill-used as himself, he took her Ashmead's letter.

"This is nice," said she. "There, I must give up loving women. Besides, they throw me over the moment a man comes, if it happens to be the right one."

"Unnatural creatures!" said Vizard.

"Ungrateful, at all events."

"Do you think she has gone into a convent?"

"Not she. In the first place, she is a Protestant; and, in the second, she is not a fool."

"I will advertise."

"The idea!"

"Do you think I am going to sit down with my hands before me, and lose her forever?"

"No, indeed; I don't think you are that sort of man at all; ha! ha!"

"Oh, Miss Gale, pity me. Tell me how to find her. That Fanny Dover says women are only enigmas to men, they understand one another."

"What!" said Rhoda, turning swiftly on him; "does that little chit pretend to read my noble Ina?"

"If she cannot, perhaps you can; you are so shrewd. Do tell me, what does it all mean?"

"It means nothing at all, I dare say; only a woman's impulse. They are such geese at times, every one of them."

"Oh, if I did but know what country she is in, I would ransack it!"

"Hum! — countries are biggish places."

"I don't care."

"What will you give me to tell you where she is at this moment?"

"All I have in the world."

"That is sufficient. Well, then, first assign me your estates; then fetch me an ordnance map of creation, and I will put my finger on her."

"You little mocking fiend, you!"

"I am not. I'm a tall, beneficent angel; and I'll tell you where she is — for nothing. Keep your land; who wants it? — it is only a bother."

"For pity's sake, don't trifle with me."

"I never will, where your heart is interested. She is at Zutzig."

"Ah, you good girl! She has written to you."

"Not a line, the monster! And I'll serve her out. I'll teach her to play hide-and-seek with Gale, M.D."

"Zutzig!" said Vizard; "how can you know?"

"What does *that* matter? Well — yes — I will reveal the mental process. First of all, she has gone to her mother."

"How do you know that?"

"Oh, dear, dear, dear! Because that is where every daughter goes in trouble. I should — she *has*. Fancy you not seeing that! Why, Fanny Dover would have told you that much in a moment. But now you will have to thank *my* mother for teaching me attention, the parent of memory. Pray, sir, who were the witnesses to that abominable marriage of hers?"

"I remember two, Baron Hompesch" —

"No, Count Hompesch."

"And Count Meurice."

"Viscount. What! have you forgotten Herr Formes, Fräulein Graafe, Zug the Capellmeister, and her very mother? Come now, whose daughter is she?"

"I forget, I'm sure."

"Walter Ferris and Eva Klosking, of Zutzig in Denmark. Pack — start for Copenhagen. Consult an ordnance map there. Find out Zutzig. Go to Zutzig, and you have got her. It is some hole in a wilderness, and she can't escape."

"You clever little angel! I'll be there in three days. Do you really think I shall succeed?"

"Your own fault if you don't. She has run into a *cul de sac* through being too clever; and, besides, women sometimes run away just to be caught, and hide on purpose to be found. I should not wonder if she has said to herself, 'He will find me if he loves me so very, very much — I'll try him.'"

"Not a word more, angelic fox," said Vizard; "I'm off to Zutzig."

He went out on fire. She opened the window, and screeched after him, "Everything is fair after her behavior to me. Take her a book of those spiritual songs she is so fond of. 'Johnny comes marching home' is worth the lot, I reckon."

Away went Vizard; found Copenhagen with ease; Zutzig with difficulty, being a small village. But once there, he soon found the farmhouse of Eva Klosking. He drove up to the door. A Danish laborer came out from the stable directly; and a buxom girl, with pale golden hair, opened the door. These two seized his luggage, and conveyed it into the house, and the hired vehicle to the stable. Vizard thought it must be an inn.

The girl bubbled melodious sounds, and ran off and brought a sweet, venerable dame. Vizard recognized Eva Klosking at once.

The old lady said, "Few strangers come here — are you not English?"

"Yes, madam."

"It is Mr. Vizard — is it not?"

"Yes, madam."

"Ah, sir, my daughter will welcome you, but not more heartily than I do. My child has told me all she owes to you," — then in Danish, "God bless the hour you come under this roof."

Vizard's heart beat tumultuously, wondering how Ina Klosking would receive him. The servant had told her

a tall stranger was come. She knew in a moment who it was; so she had the advantage of being prepared.

She came to him, her cheeks dyed with blushes, and gave him both hands. "You here!" said she; "oh, happy day! Mother, he must have the south chamber. I will go and prepare it for him. Tecla! — Tecla!" — and she was all hostess. She committed him to her mother, whilst she and the servant went up-stairs.

He felt discomfited a little. He wanted to know, all in a moment, whether she would love him.

However, Danish hospitality has its good side. He soon found out he might live the rest of his days there if he chose.

He soon got her alone, and said, "You knew I should find you, cruel one."

"How could I dream of such a thing?" said she, blushing.

"Oh, love is a detective. You said to yourself, 'If he loves me as I ought to be loved, he will search Europe for me; but he will find me.'"

"Oh, then it was not to be at peace and rest on my mother's bosom I came here — it was to give you the trouble of running after me. Oh, fie!"

"You are right. I am a vain fool."

"No, that you are not. After all, how do I know all that was in my heart? [Ahem!] Be sure of this, you are very welcome. I must go and see about your dinner."

In that Danish farmhouse life was very primitive. Eva Klosking and both her daughters helped the two female servants, or directed them, in every department. So Ina, who was on her defence, had many excuses for escaping Vizard, when he pressed her too hotly. But at last she was obliged to say, "Oh, pray, my friend, we

are in Denmark: here widows are expected to be discreet."

"But that is no reason why the English fellows who adore them should be discreet."

"Perhaps not; but then the Danish lady runs away."

Which she did.

But, after the bustle of the first day, he had so many opportunities. He walked with her, sat with her while she worked, and hung over her, entranced, while she sang. He produced the book from Vizard Court, without warning, and she screamed with delight at sight of it, and caught his hand in both hers, and kissed it. She revelled in those sweet strains which had comforted her in affliction; and oh, the eyes she turned on him after singing any song in this particular book! Those tender glances thrilled him to the very marrow.

To tell the honest truth, his arrival was a godsend to Ina Klosking. When she first came home to her native place, and laid her head on her mother's bosom, she was in elysium. The house, the wood-fires, the cooing doves, the bleating calves, the primitive life, the recollections of childhood, all were balm to her, and she felt like ending her days there. But, as the days rolled on, came a sense of monotony and excessive tranquillity. She was on the verge of *ennui* when Vizard broke in upon her.

From that moment there was no stagnation. He made life very pleasant to her; only her delicacy took the alarm at his open declarations — she thought them so premature.

At last he said to her, one day, "I begin to fear you will never love me as I love you."

"Who knows?" said she. "Time works wonders."

"I wonder," said he, "whether you will ever marry any other man?"

Ina was shocked at that. "O my friend! how could I — unless," said she, with a sly side-glance, "you consented?"

"Consent? I'd massacre him."

Ina turned towards him. "You asked my hand at a time when you thought me — I don't know what you thought — that is a thing no woman could forget. And now you have come all this way for me. I am yours, if you can wait for me."

He caught her in his arms. She disengaged herself gently, and her hand rested an unnecessary moment on his shoulder. "Is that how you understand 'waiting'?" said she, with a blush, but an indulgent smile.

"What is the use waiting?"

"It is a matter of propriety."

"How long are we to wait?"

"Only a few months. My friend, it is like a boy to be too impatient. Alas! would you marry me in my widow's cap?"

"Of course I would. Now, Ina, love, a widow who has been two years separated from her husband!"

"Certainly, that makes a difference — in one's own mind. But one must respect the opinion of the world. Dear friend, it is of you I think, though I speak of myself."

"You are an angel. Take your own time. After all, what does it matter? I don't leave Zutzig without you."

Ina's pink tint and sparkling eyes betrayed anything but horror at that insane resolution. However, she felt it her duty to say that it was unfortunate she should always be the person to distract him from his home duties.

"Oh, never mind them!" said this single-hearted lover. "I have appointed Miss Gale viceroy."

However, one day he had a letter from Zoe, telling

him that Lord Uxmoor was now urging her to name the day; but she had declined to do that, not knowing when it might suit him to be at Vizard Court. "But, dearest," said she, "mind, you are not to hurry home for me. I am very happy as I am, and I hope you will soon be as happy, love. She is a noble woman."

The latter part of this letter tempted Vizard to show it to Ina. He soon found his mistake. She kissed it, and ordered him off. He remonstrated. She put on, for the first time in Denmark, her marble look, and said, "You will lessen my esteem, if you are cruel to your sister. Let her name the wedding-day at once; and you must be there to give her away, and bless her union with a brother's love."

He submitted, but a little sullenly, and said it was very hard.

He wrote to his sister, accordingly, and she named the day, and Vizard settled to start for home, and be in time.

As to the proprieties, he had instructed Miss Maitland and Fanny Dover, and given them and La Gale *carte blanche*. It was to be a magnificent wedding.

This being excitement, Fanny Dover was in paradise. Moreover, a rosy-cheeked curate had taken the place of the venerable vicar, and Miss Dover's threat to flirt out the stigma of a nun was executed with promptitude, zeal, pertinacity, and the dexterity that comes of practice. When the day came for his leaving Zutzig, Vizard was dejected. "Who knows when we may meet again?" said he.

Ina consoled him. "Do not be sad, dear friend. You are doing your duty; and, as you do it partly to please me, I ought to try and reward you; ought I not?" And she gave him a strange look.

"I advise you not to press that question," said he.

At the very hour of parting, Ina's eyes were moist with tenderness; but there was a smile on her face very expressive; yet he could not make out what it meant. She did not cry. He thought that hard. It was his opinion that women could always cry. She might have done the usual thing just to gratify him.

He reached home in good time, and played the grand seigneur — nobody could do it better, when driven to it — to do honor to his sister. She was a peerless bride: she stood superior, with ebon locks and coal-black eyes, encircled by six bridesmaids — all picked blondes. The bevy, with that glorious figure in the middle, seemed one glorious and rare flower.

After the wedding, the breakfast, and then the travelling-carriage — the four liveried postilions bedecked with favors.

But the bride wept on Vizard's neck, and a light seemed to leave the house when she was gone. The carriages kept driving away, one after another, till four o'clock; and then Vizard sat disconsolate in his study, and felt very lonely.

Yet a thing no bigger than a leaf sufficed to drive away this sombre mood, — a piece of amber-colored paper, scribbled on with a pencil — a telegram from Ashmead: "Good news: lost sheep turned up. Is now with her mother at Claridge's Hotel."

Then Vizard was in raptures. Now, he understood Ina's composure, and the half-sly look she had given him, and her dry eyes at parting, and other things. He tore up to London directly, with a telegram flying ahead: burst in upon her and had her in his arms in a moment, before her mother. She fenced no longer, but owned he had gained her love as he had deserved it in every way.

She consented to be married that week in London; only she asked for a Continental tour before entering

Vizard Court as his wife; but she did not stipulate even for that; she only asked it submissively, as one whose duty it now was to obey, not dictate.

They were married in St. George's Church very quietly, by special license. Then they saw her mother off, and crossed to Calais. They spent two happy months together on the Continent, and returned to London.

But Vizard was too old-fashioned, and too proud of his wife, to sneak into Vizard Court with her. He did not make it a county matter, but he gave the village such a *fête* as had not been seen for many a day. The preparations were intrusted to Mr. Ashmead, at Ina's request. "He will be sure to make it theatrical," she said; "but perhaps the simple villagers will admire that, and it will amuse you and me, love; and the poor dear old thing will be in his glory — I hope he will not drink too much."

Ashmead was indeed in his glory. Nothing had been seen in a play that he did not electrify Islip with, and the surrounding villages. He pasted large posters on walls and barn-doors, and his small bills curled round the patriarchs of the forest and the roadside trees, and blistered the gate-posts.

The day came. A soapy pole, with a leg of mutton on high for the successful climber; races in sacks; short blindfold races with wheelbarrows; pig with a greasy tail, to be won by him who could catch him and shoulder him, without touching any other part of him; bowls of treacle for the boys to duck heads in and fish out coins; skittles, nine-pins, Aunt Sally, etc., etc., etc.

But what astonished the villagers most was a Maypole, with long ribbons, about which ballet-girls, undisguised as Highlanders, danced, and wound and unwound the parti-colored streamers to the merry fiddle, and then danced reels upon a platform, then returned to their little tent: but out again and danced hornpipes undisguised as Jacky Tars.

Beer flowed from a sturdy regiment of barrels. "The Court" kitchen and the village bakehouse kept pouring forth meats, baked, boiled, and roast; there was a pile of loaves like a haystack; and they roasted an ox whole on the green, and when they found they were burning him raw, they fetched the butcher, like sensible fellows, and dismembered the giant, and so roasted him reasonably.

In the midst of the revelling and feasting, Vizard and Mrs. Vizard were driven into Islip village, in the family coach with four horses, streaming with ribbons.

They drove round the green, bowing and smiling in answer to the acclamations and blessings of the poor, and then to Vizard Court. The great doors flew open. The servants, male and female, lined the hall on both sides, and received her, bowing and courtesying low, on the very spot where she had nearly met her death. Her husband took her hand and conducted her in state to her own apartment.

It was open house to all that joyful day; and at night magnificent fireworks on the sweep, seen from the drawing-room by Mrs. Vizard, Miss Maitland, Miss Gale, Miss Dover, and the rosy-cheeked curate, whom she had tied to her apron-strings.

At two in the morning, Mr. Harris showed Mr. Ashmead to his couch. Both gentlemen went up the stairs a little graver than any of our modern judges, and firm as a rock; but their firmness resembled that of a roof rather than a wall; for these dignities as they went made one inverted V — so, A.

It is time the Woman-Hater drew to a close, for the woman-hater is spoilt. He begins sarcastic speeches, from force of habit, but stops short in the middle. He is a very happy man, and owes it to a woman, and knows it. He adores her; and to love well is to be happy.

But, besides that, she watches over his happiness and his good with that unobtrusive, but minute vigilance which belongs to her sex, and is often misapplied, but not so very often as cynics say. Even the honest friendship between him and the remarkable woman he calls his "virago," gives him many a pleasant hour. He is still a humorist, though cured of his fling at the fair sex. His last tolerable hit was at the monosyllabic names of the immortal composers his wife had disinterred in his library. Says he to parson Denison, hot from Oxford, "They remind me of the Oxford poets in the last century: —

Alma novem celebres genuit Rhedyeina Poetas.
Bubb, Stubb, Grubb, Crabbe, Trappe, Brome, Carey, Tickell, Evans."

As for Ina Vizard, La Klosking no longer, she has stepped into her new place with her native dignity, seemliness, and composure. At first, a few county ladies put their little heads together, and prepared to give themselves airs; but the beauty, dignity, and enchanting grace of Mrs. Vizard swept this little faction away like small dust. Her perfect courtesy, her mild but deep dislike of all feminine backbiting, her dead silence about the absent, except when she can speak kindly — these rare traits have forced, by degrees, the esteem and confidence of her own sex. As for the men, they accepted her at once with enthusiasm. She and Lady Uxmoor are the acknowledged belles of the county. Lady Uxmoor's face is the most admired; but Mrs. Vizard comes next — and her satin shoulders, statuesque bust and arms, and exquisite hand, turn the scale with some. But when she speaks, she charms; and when she sings, all competition dies.

She is faithful to music, and especially to sacred music. She is not very fond of singing at parties, and

sometimes gives offence by declining. Music sets fools talking, because it excites them, and then their folly comes out by the road nature has provided. But when Mrs. Vizard has to sing in one key, and people talk in five other keys, that gives this artist such physical pain that she often declines, merely to escape it. It does not much mortify her vanity, she has so little.

She always sings in church, and sings out, too, when she is there; and plays the harmonium. She trains the villagers — girls, boys, and adults — with untiring good-humor and patience.

Amongst her pupils are two fine voices: Tom Wilder, a grand bass — and the rosy-cheeked curate, a greater rarity still, a genuine counter-tenor.

These two can both read music tolerably; but the curate used to sing everything, however full of joy, with a pathetic whine, for which Vizard chaffed him in vain; but Mrs. Vizard *persuaded* him out of it, where argument and satire failed.

People came far and near to hear the hymns at Islip Church, sung in full harmony — trebles, tenor, counter-tenor, and bass.

A trait — she allows nothing to be sung in church unrehearsed. The rehearsals are on Saturday night, and never shirked, such is the respect for "Our Dame." To be sure, "Our Dame" fills the stomachs and wets the whistles of her faithful choir on Saturday nights.

On Sunday night there are performances of sacred music in the great dining-hall. But these are rather more ambitious than those in the village church. The performers meet on that happy footing of *camaraderie* the fine arts create, the superior respect shown to Mrs. Vizard being mainly paid to her as the greater musician. They attack anthems and services; and a trio, by the parson, the blacksmith, and "Our Dame," is really an

extraordinary treat, owing to the great beauty of the voices. It is also piquant to hear the female singer constantly six, and often ten, notes below the male countertenor; but then comes Wilder with his diapason, and the harmony is noble; the more so that Mrs. Vizard rehearses her pupils in the swell — a figure too little practised in music, and nowhere carried out as she does it.

One night the organist of Barford was there. They sang Kent's service in F, and Mrs. Vizard still admired it. She and the parson swelled in the duet — "To be a light to lighten the Gentiles," etc. Organist approved the execution, but said the composition was a meagre thing, quite out of date. "We have much finer things now by learned men of the day."

"Ah," said she, "bring me one."

So, next Sunday, he brought her a learned composition, and played it to her, preliminary to their singing it. But she declined it on the spot. "What!" said she. "Mr. X., would you compare this meaningless stuff with Kent in F? Why, in Kent the dominant sentiment of each composition is admirably preserved. His 'Magnificat' is lofty jubilation, with a free onward rush. His 'Dimittis' is divine repose after life's fever. But this poor pedant's 'Magnificat' begins with a mere crash, and then falls into the pathetic — an excellent thing in its place, but not in a song of triumph. As to his 'Dimittis,' it simply defies the words. This is no Christian sunset. It is not good old Simeon gently declining to his rest, content to close those eyes which had seen the world's salvation. This is a tempest, and all the windows rattling, and the great Napoleon dying, amidst the fury of the elements, with 'tête d'armée!' on his dying lips, and 'battle' in his expiring soul. No, sir; if the learned Englishmen of this day can do nothing nearer the mark

than DOLEFUL MAGNIFICATS and STORMY NUNC DIMITTISES, I shall stand faithful to poor dead Kent, and his fellows — they were my solace in sickness and sore trouble."

In accordance with these views of vocal music, and desirous to expand its sphere, Mrs. Vizard has just offered handsome prizes in the county for the best service, in which the dominant sentiments of the words shall be as well preserved as in Kent's despised service; and another prize to whoever can set any famous short secular poem, or poetical passage (not in ballad metre), to good and appropriate music.

This has elicited several pieces. The composers have tried their hands on Dryden's Ode; on the meeting of Hector and Andromache (Pope's "Homer"); on two short poems of Tennyson, etc.

But it is only the beginning of a good thing. The pieces are under consideration. But Vizard says the competitors are trifles. *He* shall set Mr. Arnold's version of "Hero and Leander" to the harp, and sing it himself. This, he intimates, will silence competition, and prove an era. I think so too, if his music should *happen* to equal the lines in value. But I hardly think it will, because the said Vizard, though he has taste and ear, does not know one note from another. So I hope "Hero and Leander" will fall into abler hands; and, in any case, I trust Mrs. Vizard will succeed in her worthy desire to enlarge, very greatly, the sphere and the nobility of vocal music. It is a desire worthy of this remarkable character, of whom I now take my leave with regret.

I must own that regret is caused in part by my fear that I may not have done her all the justice I desired.

I have long felt and regretted that many able female writers are doing much to perpetuate the petty vices of

a sex, which, after all, is at present but half educated, by devoting three thick volumes to such empty women as biography, though a lower art than fiction, would not waste three pages on. They plead truth and fidelity to nature. "We write the average woman, for the average woman to read," say they. But they are not consistent; for the average woman is under five feet, and rather ugly. Now these paltry women are all beautiful — *καλαι τε μεγαλαι τε*, as Homer hath it.

Fiction has just as much right to select large female souls as biography or painting has; and to pick out a selfish, shallow, illiterate creature, with nothing but beauty, and bestow three enormous volumes on her, is to make a perverse selection, beauty being, after all, rarer in women than wit, sense, and goodness. It is as false and ignoble in art, as to marry a pretty face without heart and brains is silly in conduct.

Besides, it gives the female *reader* a low model instead of a high one, and so does her a little harm; whereas a writer ought to do good — or try, at all events.

Having all this in my mind, and remembering how many noble women have shone like stars in every age and every land, and feeling sure that, as civilization advances, such women will become far more common, I have tried to look ahead and paint La Klosking.

But such portraiture is difficult. It is writing a statue.

> "Qui mihi non credit faciat licet ipse periclum,
> Mox fuerit studiis æquior ille meis."

Harrington Vizard, Esq., caught Miss Fanny Dover on the top round but one of the steps in his library. She looked down, pinkish, and said she was searching for "Tillotson's Sermons."

"What on earth can you want of them?"

"To improve my mind, to be sure," said the minx.

Vizard said, "Now you stay there, miss — don't you move;" and he sent for Ina. She came directly, and he said, "Things have come to a climax. My lady is hunting for 'Tillotson's Sermons.' Poor Denison!" (that was the rosy curate's name.)

"Well," said Fanny, turning red, "I told you I *should*. Why should I be good any longer? All the sick are cured one way or other, and I am myself again."

"Humph!" said Vizard. "Unfortunately for your little plans of conduct, the heads of this establishment here present, have sat in secret committee, and your wings are to be clipped — by order of the Council."

"La!" said Fanny, pertly.

Vizard imposed silence with a lordly wave. "It is a laughable thing; but this divine is in earnest. He has revealed his hopes and fears to me."

"Then he is a great baby," said Fanny, coming down the steps. "No, no; we are both too poor." And she vented a little sigh.

"Not you. The vicar has written to vacate. Now I don't like you much, because you never make me laugh: but I'm awfully fond of Denison; and if you will marry my dear Denison, you shall have the vicarage — it is a fat one."

"Oh, cousin!"

"And," said Mrs. Vizard, "he permits me to furnish it for you. You and I will make it 'a bijou.'"

Fanny kissed them both impetuously, then said she would have a little cry. No sooner said than done. In due course she was Mrs. Denison, and broke a solemn vow that she never would teach girls St. Matthew.

Like coquettes in general, who have had their fling at the proper time, she makes a pretty good wife; but she has one fault — she is too hard upon girls who flirt.

Mr. Ashmead flourishes. Besides his agency, he sometimes treats for a new piece, collects a little company, and tours the provincial theatres. He always plays them a week at Taddington, and with perfect gravity loses six pounds per night. Then he has a "bespeak," Vizard or Uxmoor turn about. There is a line of carriages; the snobs crowd in to see the gentry. Vizard pays twenty pounds for his box, and takes twenty pounds worth of tickets, and Joseph is in his glory, and stays behind the company to go to Islip Church next day, and spend a happy night at the Court. After that he says he feels *good* for three or four days.

Mrs. Gale now leases the Hillstoke farm off Vizard, and does pretty well. She breeds a great many sheep and cattle. The high ground and sheltering woods suit them. She makes a little money every year, and gets a very good house for nothing.

Doctress Gale is still all eyes, and notices everything. She studies hard and practises a little. They tried to keep her out of the Taddington infirmary: but she went almost crying to Vizard, and he exploded with wrath. He consulted Lord Uxmoor, and between them the infirmary was threatened with the withdrawal of eighty annual subscriptions if they persisted. The managers caved in directly, and Doctress Gale is a steady visitor.

A few mothers are coming to their senses, and sending for her to their unmarried daughters. This is the main source of her professional income. She has, however, taken one enormous fee from a *bon vivant*, whose life she saved by esculents. She told him at once he was beyond the reach of medicine, and she could do nothing for him unless he chose to live in her house, and eat and drink only what she should give him. He had a horror of dying, though he had lived so well; so he submitted, and she did actually cure that one glutton. But she

says she will never do it again. "After forty years of made dishes they ought to be content to die; it is bare justice," quoth Rhoda Gale, M.D.

An apothecary in Barford threatened to indict this Gallic physician. But the other medical men dissuaded him, partly from liberality, partly from discretion: the fine would have been paid by public subscription twenty times over, and nothing gained but obloquy. The doctress would never have yielded.

She visits, and prescribes, and laughs at the law, as love is said to laugh at locksmiths.

To be sure, in this country, a law is no law, when it has no foundation in justice, morality, or public policy.

Happy in her position, and in her friends, she now reviews past events with the candor of a mind that loves truth sincerely. She went into Vizard's study one day, folded her arms, and delivered herself as follows: "I guess there's something I ought to say to *you*. When I told you about our treatment at Edinburgh, the wound still bled, and I did not measure my words as I ought, professing science. Now I feel a call to say that the Edinburgh school, was, after all, more liberal to us than any other in Great Britain or Ireland. The others closed the door in our faces. This school opened it half. At first there was a liberal spirit: but the friends of justice got frightened, and the unionists stronger. We were overpowered at every turn. But what I omitted to impress on you is, that when we were defeated, it was always by very small majorities. That was so even with the opinions of the judges, which have been delivered since I told you my tale. There were six jurists, and only seven pettifoggers. It was so all through. Now, for practical purposes, the act of a majority is the act of a body. It must be so; it is the way of the world: but when an accurate person comes to describe

a business, and deal with the character of a whole university, she is not to call the larger half the whole, and make the matter worse than it was. That is not scientific. Science *dis*criminates."

I am not sorry the doctress offered this little explanation; it accords with her sober mind and her veneration of truth. But I could have dispensed with it for one. In Britain, when we are hurt, we howl; and the deuce is in it if the weak may not howl when the strong overpower them by the arts of the weak.

Should that part of my tale rouse any honest sympathy with this Englishwoman who can legally prescribe, consult, and take fees, in France, but not in England, though she could eclipse at a public examination nine-tenths of those who can, it may be as well to inform them that, even while her narrative was in the press, our government declared it would do something for the relief of medical women, but would sleep upon it.

This is, on the whole, encouraging. But still, where there is no stimulus of faction or personal interest to urge a measure, but only such "unconsidered trifles" as public justice and public policy, there are always two great dangers: 1, that the sleep may know no waking; 2, that after too long a sleep the British legislator may jump out of bed, all in a hurry, and do the work ineffectually — for nothing leads oftener to reckless haste than long delay.

I hope, then, that a few of my influential readers will be vigilant, and challenge a full discussion by the whole mind of Parliament, so that no temporary, pettifogging half-measure may slip into a thin house — like a weasel into an empty barn — and so obstruct for many years legislation upon durable principle. The thing lies in a nutshell. The legislature has been entrapped. It never intended to outlaw women in the matter. The persons

who have outlawed them are all subjects, and the engines of outlawry have been "certificates of attendance on lectures," and "public examinations." By closing the lecture-room and the examination-hall to all women — learned or unlearned — a clique has outlawed a population, under the letter, not the spirit, of a badly-written statute. But it is for the three estates of the British realm to leave off scribbling statutes, and learn to write them, and to bridle the egotism of cliques, and respect the nation. The present form of government exists on that understanding, and so must all forms of government in England. And it is so easy. It only wants a little singleness of mind and common-sense. Years ago certificates of attendance on various lectures were reasonably demanded. They were a slight presumptive evidence of proficiency, and had a supplementary value, because the public examinations were so loose and inadequate; but once establish a stiff, searching, sufficient, incorruptible, public examition, and then to have passed that examination is not presumptive but demonstrative proof of proficiency, and swallows up all minor and merely presumptive proofs.

There is nothing much stupider than anachronism. What avail certificates of lectures in our day? either the *knowledge* obtained at the lectures enables the pupil to pass the great examination, or it does not. If it does, the certificate is superfluous; if it does not, the certificate is illusory.

What the British legislator, if for once he would rise to be a lawgiver, should do, and that quickly, is to throw open the medical schools to all *persons* for matriculation. To throw open all hospitals and infirmaries to matriculated students, without respect of sex, as they are already open, by shameless partiality and transparent greed, to unmatriculated women, provided they confine their ambition to the most repulsive and unfeminine

part of medicine, the nursing of both sexes and laying out of corpses.

Both the above rights, as independent of sex as other natural rights, should be expressly protected by "mandamus," and "suit for damages." The lecturers to be compelled to lecture to mixed classes, or to give separate lectures to matriculated women for half fees, whichever those lecturers prefer. Before this clause all difficulties would melt like hail in the dogdays. Male modesty is a purely imaginary article set up for a trade purpose, and will give way to justice the moment it costs the proprietors fifty per cent. I know my own sex from hair to heel, and will take my Bible oath of *that.*

Of the foreign matriculated student, British or European, nothing should be demanded but the one thing which matters one straw — viz., infallible proofs of proficiency in anatomy, surgery, medicine, and its collaterals, under public examination. This, which is the only real safeguard, and the only necessary safeguard to the *public*, and the only one *the public* asks, should be placed, in some degree, under the *sure control of government* without respect of cities; and much greater vigilance exercised than ever has been yet. Why, under the system which excludes learned women, male dunces have been personated by able students, and so diplomas stolen again and again. The student, male or female, should have power to compel the examiners, by mandamus and other stringent remedies, to examine at fit times and seasons. In all the *paper-work* of these examinations, the name, and of course the sex, of the student should be concealed from the examiners. There is a very simple way of doing it.

Should a law be passed on this broad and simple basis, that law will stand immortal, with pettifogging acts falling all around, according to the custom of the country.

The larger half of the population will no longer be unconstitutionally juggled, under cover of law, out of their right to take their secret ailments to a skilled physician of their own sex, and compelled to go, blushing, writhing, and, after all, concealing and fibbing, to a male physician; the picked few no longer robbed of their right to science, reputation, and bread.

The good effect on the whole mind of woman would be incalculable. Great prizes of study and genius offered to the able few have always a salutary and wonderful operation on the many who never gain them. It would be great and glad tidings to our whole female youth to say, "You *need* not be frivolous idlers; you *need* not give the colts fifty yards start for the Derby — I mean, you need not waste three hours of the short working day in dressing and undressing, and combing your hair. You need not throw away the very seed-time of life on music though you are unmusical to the backbone; nor yet on your three 'C's' — croquet, crochet, and coquetry: for civilization and sound law have opened to you one great, noble, and difficult profession with three branches, two of which Nature intended you for. The path is arduous, but flowers grow beside it, and the prize is great."

I say that this prize, and frequent intercourse with those superior women who have won it, would leaven the whole sex with higher views of life than enter their heads at present; would raise their self-respect, and set thousands of them to study the great and noble things that are in medicine, and connected with it, instead of childish things.

Is there really one manly heart that would grudge this boon to a sex which is the nurse and benefactress of every man in his tender and most precarious years?

Realize the hard condition of women. Amongst barbarians their lot is unmixed misery; with us their condition is better, but not what it ought to be, because we are but half-civilized, and so their lot is still very unhappy compared with ours.

And we are so unreasonable. We men cannot go straight ten yards without *rewards* as well as punishments. Yet we would govern our women by punishments alone. They are eternally tempted to folly, yet snubbed the moment they would be wise. A million shops spread their nets, and entice them by their direst foible. Their very mothers — for want of medical knowledge in the sex — clasp the fatal, idiotic corset on their growing bodies, though thin as a lath. So the girl grows up, crippled in the ribs and lungs by her own mother; and her life, too, is in stays — cabined, cribbed, confined: unless she can paint, or act, or write novels, every path of honorable ambition is closed to her. We treat her as we do our private soldiers — the lash, but no promotion; and our private soldiers are the scum of Europe for that very reason, and no other.

I say that to open the study and practice of medicine to women-folk, under the infallible safeguard of a stiff public examination, will be to rise in respect for human rights to the level of European nations, who do not brag about just freedom half as loud as we do; and to respect the constitutional rights of many million citizens, who all pay the taxes like men, and by the contract with the State implied in that payment, by the clear human right they have yet to go down on their knees for. But it will also import into medical science a new and less theoretical, but cautious, teachable, observant kind of intellect; it will give the larger half of the nation an honorable ambition, and an honorable pursuit, towards which their hearts and instincts are bent by Nature herself; it will

tend to elevate this whole sex, and its young children, male as well as female, and so will advance the civilization of the world, which in ages past, in our own day, and in all time, hath, and doth, and will keep step exactly with the progress of women towards mental equality with men.